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THE MINISTER OF STATE



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The Minister of State

A NOVEL

BY

John A. Steuart

Author of

"In the Day of Battle," "Kilgroom,"

&c.

"That which God writes on thy forehead thou will come to."

THE KORAN.

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

1898



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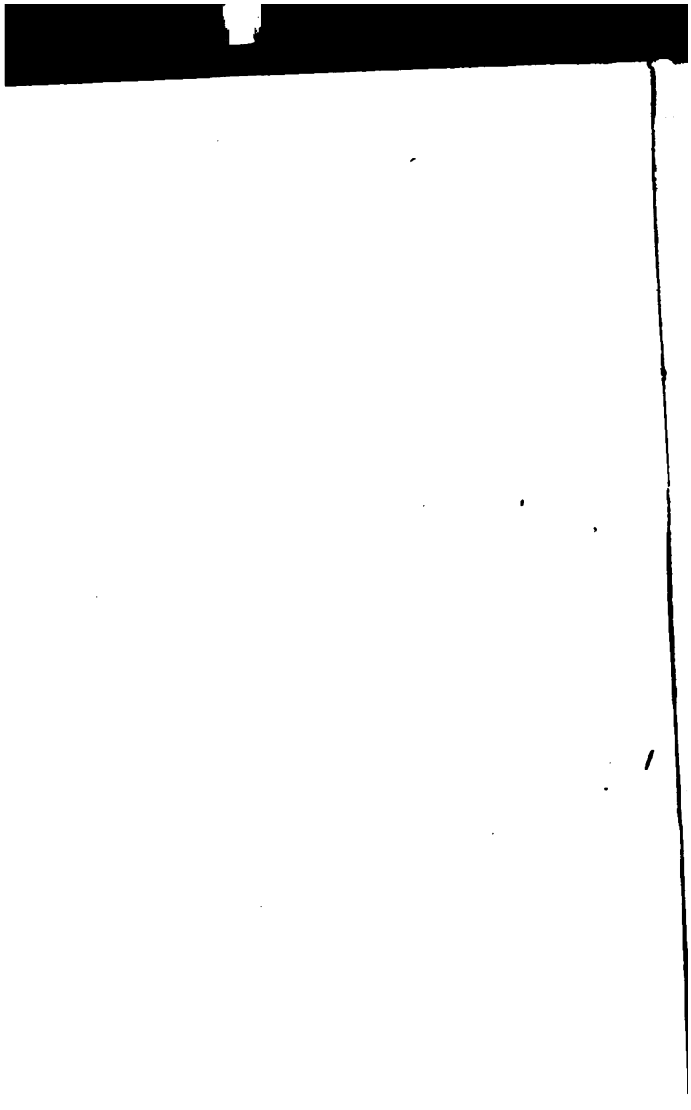
Redfield Bros., New York



To A. M. S.

We wrote this story together; what it owes to your vigilance and judgment I know best, and it gratifies me to send it forth with your initials (if these must be all) on the fly-leaf. A drama of romance in reality you have called it. Let the definition serve. The son of the heather descends into the midst of the city and the city hastens to make him her own; and in her own way and time tests, as with fire, both him and some linked to him—in bonds not to be shaken off. Through all the revolutions of fortune you watched over the personages of my history, tenderly solicitous for their well-being, yet never forgetful of the touchstone, nor failing in the opportune word of counsel. To their good genius, therefore, this book is fittingly inscribed.

J. A. S.



BOOK I—ARCADIA

"I watch the green fields growing,
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams."

SWINBURNE, *The Garden of Proserpine.*

CHAPTER I

MUCH was expected of Evan, for he was ten, and had bed, board, and five half-crowns for the unremitting labour of nine months. And yet other appetising ingredients spiced his brimming cup. As often as Sunday came he was regaled, without thought of expense, on a pale ineffable infusion of tea-leaves thrice brewed, and half a barley scone nicely smeared with butter. At least once a quarter also his segment of fine bread bore a delicate suggestion of jam, as if ethereal fingers had stained it with a kind of crimson dew. But in reality the dainty conserve was spread by the fat hand of his aunt and mistress, expressly to produce that rapture of surprise, that gusto of soul and body which bountiful people love to witness in the objects of their affections.

From such a pack of blessings fealty and gratitude might be expected to result as naturally as reaping follows sowing, were not nature for ever cynically deriding the natural. So lively was Evan's feeling of obligation, that he gaily made requital by treating benefits and benefactors alike as opportune sport for the comic spirit, and, absorbed in the pursuit of amusement, forgot discretion.

He had speedy reason to regret his merry irreverences. Benevolence so tried is not eternal, and in this instance it failed suddenly. No more luxuries, no more pampering,



cried the dispensing power, bristling retributively. Those who had not the grace to value good tea, and barley scone with butter and jam, could cool their blood on less dainty fare. So, in caustic recognition of his gifts, the satirist was put on porridge, potatoes, pease-bread, and broth, with a mid-day morsel of salt beef. Moreover, to digest the first fruits of his sarcasm he had sauce of the most piquant kind, that is to say, charges of flagrant neglect of duty, with threats of unmentionable vengeance if there were not prompt amendment.

Candour will not deny there was cause for complaint. An exacting and irascible employer who commits to your care fifteen head of depraved cattle is entitled to be wroth over breach of trust; and Evan's defections were becoming intolerable. But how are you to subdue the lion's whelp to the docility and functions of a watch dog? Neil Macgregor, on whom rested the double responsibility of master and uncle, was at his wits' end over the problem. In the heat of his musings he remembered many precepts and axioms bearing upon the correction of froward youth, Solomon's grim hint being among them; and there were chastenings betimes. But it was a case of spoiling the rod without bettering the child. The proof of improvement lies in conduct: you shall judge of Evan's.

On the western side of Tullyven Burn, then a mere runnel at which the youngest calf would not boggle, was a neighbour's field of sweet turnips; for this field the cows cherished a ravenous and ill-regulated passion, and divers matters, urgent beyond the comprehension of adults, engaged the boy's attention. Sometimes he had to take the brag out of a rival herd who, coming with flouts and challenges, would depart with a streaming nose and a pair of black eyes; sometimes to see that Tweed got fair play in a fight; sometimes to maintain his supremacy in the great game of "jump the cuddy"; again to chase squirrels, guddle trout, or dig out rabbits.

For the present, however, his chief care was to save from waste the product of a raspberry thicket which flourished secretly and luxuriantly in the depths of an oak wood hard by. When the herd found it necessary to gather fruit the cows were under a similar compulsion to adjourn to the turnip-field, where they rioted with all the transports of the illicit, until some one did a little arduous hunting.



A general reckoning invariably ensued. With the effective assistance of Tweed, his *fidus Achates*, and such stimulus to bovine virtue as a thick hazel coppice furnished, Evan took it out of the cows, to the great diminution of dairy produce; and with the help of a supple switch Neil Macgregor in due course took it out of Evan, to the grievous discomfort of bare legs. These visitations commonly brought the transgressor an urgent thought to mend, to taste the tranquil joy of self-abnegation; and he was always a model of propriety until fate again led him into temptation. Then the natural man had once more his fling. After all, time is more constant than chance. By a happy dispensation of Providence, one may repent in all weathers, in any season, but ripe rasps are fleeting mercies that must be seized as they are presented. So Evan went his way, and the cows went their way; and retribution followed delinquency as unfailingly as darkness overtakes light.

Suddenly there came a crisis which crystallised flitting intentions into a fixed decision. Evan felt that the moment for bringing matters to a head was cruelly chosen, for the rasps were at their best; and it was with bubblings of revolt and a burning conviction that the ways of the well-doer are indeed hard that he clenched his teeth for good courses.

As a means of overcoming the tempter he began to cut his name in big, deep, determined letters on the huge beech-tree in honour of which the pasture was called the beech-tree field. The giant crowned a height overlooking the seductive thicket, a height that was in some sort a Pisgah eminence, whence, if he cared, the martyr to duty could at least contemplate, if he durst not enter, the delectable land. He did not once look down, however, lest the sight should be too much for him.

As he slashed and stabbed, with a very blunt knife and a very red face, all at once he was arrested by some one loudly calling his name. Turning quickly to see who had the temerity to interrupt him in his penance, he was confronted by two young ladies, whose manner was the reverse of timorous or apologetic. One was Miss Florence Dudley, an audacious young person with bare, plump, embrowned legs, flying, fluffy tangles of brown hair, a gauzy white frock, a gossamer pinafore, a bloomer or sun-bonnet of the dimensions of an ordinary umbrella, and eyes that spoke

several expressive languages; the other was Miss Dudley's maid, and Evan counted both as friends.

Miss Dudley was on the verge of her fifth birthday and had the imperious yet familiar manner proper to that mature age. An unwavering belief that the universe had been created for her exclusive pleasure inclined her to captivating airs of autocracy and occasional spurts of petulant impatience. Ignorant of Evan's resolution to tread the thorny paths of rectitude, she did not see why he should waste time whittling with an old knife. Accordingly the unconventional greetings were hardly over when she ordered him to desist, put up his knife, and prove his capacity for better things by gathering her a capful of raspberries.

This was assailing St. Anthony on his weakest side; yet he had no thought of crying "Avaunt"; for perhaps the most winning quality of a saint is his readiness to fall under adequate temptation. Suspending his carving operations, Evan examined the chubby face and the aggressive eyes with a look at least as dauntless as their own. A giddy sense of privileged wickedness thrilled through all his members. Had Heaven sent him a fair excuse for breaking the Commandments? It was unlike the ways of Heaven, but it might be true. Tingling with the thought, he noted that Miss Dudley's golden-brown curls, which reminded him of the sunlit ripples of a peat burn, were bewitchingly disordered, and his æsthetic feeling was gratified by bits of colour that shone in her dress—crimson ribbon deftly distributed in shoulder-bows, and a curiously knotted sash that was fairly ravishing. St. Anthony joyfully hugged the opportunity of being tempted by such a serpent.

He was peremptorily called to attention by the question how long he intended to stand dallying. Again he examined the questioner, deliberately, admiringly, and a little compassionately. An odd foreboding in the legs warned him to be cautious. On the whole it might be safest for St. Anthony to cry "Avaunt": there are times when even a saint must be politic.

"They will not let me," he answered at length.

"Den I will not love zoo any more," said Miss Dudley; and behind the offended gleam of the eye was just a suspicion of moisture. The hesitating gallant flushed. What if she should cry on his hand? Then a darker thought thrilled his heart, and his face burned. What if she should



think him capable of faltering in his gallantry? The idea was enough to screw his courage to any feat of rebellion.

She stood regarding him with a pouted mouth and a contracted brow, her short fat fingers twisting the sash so savagely that he felt as if his neck were being wrung. Dare he venture upon forbidden things?

Lifting his eyes from the puckered face, the shoulder-knots, and the ravishing sash, he cast a prospecting look afield. It embraced the whole strathside, stretching upward in swift yet harmonious gradations of colour from the green of grass and infant crops to the shimmering purple of heather, the grey of granite cliff, and the cool, fathomless azure of the far horizon.

The shining fields were dotted with labourers who appeared to be idly basking in the sun, so slight were their movements. Here and there a whitewashed building gleamed brilliantly and an occasional window flashed as if with living fire; but the sparse farmsteads were mostly a sombre drab, with thatched roofs that did not glitter, and eaves and gables unknown to fashionable systems of architecture. At least three burns were visible as dancing lines of light where their currents were not greatly vexed, or sparkling showers of foam as they "fell scattered down the rocks." Oak and fir plantations mottled the lower slopes; overhead, lifted to an unusual height, was a fleckless indigo sky, and the "eye of heaven" burned with a dazzling lustre.

Pitweem, to which Evan owed the ill-appreciated mercies already enumerated, simmered in a shadowless heat, and Braeside, happier in having shade, slept a scarce breathing sleep under its straggling plane-trees. To Braeside belonged the enticing field of turnips; and the tenant, Alexander Fraser, commonlly known as Red Sandy from the general fieriness of hair and face, had been unpleasantly active of late in resenting the raids of his neighbour's cattle. But Evan reckoned that, overcome by drowsiness, he was just then probably snoring aloud in shirt sleeves and unloosed collar; for Sandy being stout, maimed, elderly, and well-to-do, loved his mid-day nap. There was not a soul visible about Braeside to damp the ardour of chivalry.

Closer at hand things were equally auspicious. The cows browsed virtuously and peacefully, knee deep in clover and buttercups, patterns of what respectable kine should be. Even Rosy, the one-horned vixen that took the van in

thievish excursions, seemed to harbour no gluttonous designs upon the turnip-field, while the great bull cropped his succulent mouthfuls with an air of innocence and content, as if this were indeed Paradise. Man and beast conspired to make sinning safe.

Nevertheless, as no herd of experience would trust to appearances, Tweed was sent out to give the cattle a disciplinary canter round the field. They returned panting, their heads and tails in the air, their nostrils wide and red, their general mien truculent and resentful. Tweed trotted back to his master's heel, happy in a sense of duty well done: then telling the ladies to follow and mind their feet in the descent, Evan dropped down a long steep bank towards the raspberry thicket. Next minute, with dripping fingers and a complete forgetfulness of the past, he was pouring the luscious fruit into the outspread handkerchief of Florence, who rewarded him with smiles and rapturous exclamations.

Time is man's most treacherous enemy. Evan could have taken his solemn oath on the big family Bible that he was not two minutes engaged in this knightly service, and that the cattle could not possibly have reached the turnip-field, even if they had made for it at the gallop, when he heard an ominous barking that made him pause and hold his breath.

"Gosh! I'll get my licks now," he remarked with a flash of divination and a long breath of apprehension.

"Never oo mind," said his youngest companion, whose face by this time was one daub of red. "Never oo mind. I'll div zoo a tiss and love zoo."

She was prepared to redeem her promise on the instant, but before she could so much as purse her sanguinary little mouth Evan was tearing upward through a clump of hazels, calling loudly upon Tweed. Reaching the top in a state of palpitating excitement, he beheld his fifteen head of cattle disporting themselves riotously in the very centre of the turnip-field. Two uncommonly active dogs were on their heels, the attack being directed by Red Sandy in person. Evan gazed for a moment breathless and speechless, then observed to himself very quietly that undoubtedly all the fat was in the fire this time.



CHAPTER II

THERE was, however, no dallying with regret. The cattle taking the burn at a plunge, like a drove in a panic—horns driving furiously, tails tossing like war-plumes in a charge —passed to such rewards as irate Justice provided with fangs and a hazel cudgel could most readily bestow. Tweed took flying heels in mouthfuls, and Evan, laying hold on the ringleader's tail, quickly reduced his staff to slivers on her iniquitous rump.

That operation satisfactorily completed, he turned to look for Red Sandy, and was more surprised than comforted to see that gentleman hobbling across the pasture at a gait that indicated anything but friendly intentions.

At four hundred paces the signals of his wrath were unmistakeable, and Evan, instinctively counting the blisters that remained since his last reckoning, wondered how many more the present settlement would mean.

For taking vengeance upon a light-footed herd with the resource of wide fields and steep braesides Red Sandy was rather seriously handicapped. One whole leg, a second eked out by a wooden stump, and a crutch make a disheartening equipment of nether limbs. Such disabilities, indeed, would send the average man to an arm-chair, the chimney-cheek, and impotent grumbling. But Sandy was one of the rare spirits who are braced and spurred by disadvantages. You had but to tickle his dander as you might touch a spring in some devilish automaton to enjoy such an exhibition of energy as the best limbed man in the country-side could scarce have matched. His motive power being now at topmost pressure, he was making uncanny speed, leg, stump, and crutch appearing to propel him by a species of unholy magic.

Evan gazed in fascination, a mark of attention which Red Sandy acknowledged by stopping at intervals to whirl his crutch about his head and then shake it truculently at the delinquent, as if to say: "You just be good enough to wait till I catch you, and the Lord have mercy on your hide!"

When presently Sandy drew near, his face purple, his eyes like points of fire, his nostrils like blow-pipes, his

mouth full of curdling objurgations, and intimated a fixed determination to smash Evan's head to atoms, Evan judiciously retired. Thereupon Red Sandy putting on a spurt, as if to show how easily three legs could overhaul two, overbalanced and fell with a groan of fury. Scrambling back to the perpendicular with hideous contortions of the countenance and expletives that would look ill in print, he shook his crutch fiercely, vowing to let the culprit "have it," if the hunt should continue till the sound of the last trump. Then once more plying his pins like a centipede, he advanced at the double, desiring Evan to wait and be pounded to jelly. Declining these overtures, Evan continued his retreat slowly and in good order, keeping perhaps fifty yards ahead of his pursuer. This was wind and fuel to Red Sandy's fire. He paused a moment as if to consider; then quick as thought he thrust out the stump sideways as a prop, reversed the crutch, and swinging it thrice round his head sent it whizzing at Evan with a petrifying malediction. It fell short of its mark, but Evan at least partially carried out its owner's purpose by springing nimbly and capturing it.

Red Sandy's breath left him as if he had been wantonly punched in the pit of the stomach, and like our great grandparent on discovering the primary human trespass, he "amazed, astonished stood, and blank." The blankness was but for an instant. Recovering himself with wondrous celerity, he informed Evan that if the crutch were retained another moment utter and complete annihilation would be mild compared to the tragedy that should be enacted.

Evan studied the fuming Sandy with a feeling almost equally compounded of fear and amusement. The situation was unquestionably grave and the policy of aggravation perilous; but with the enemy's chief weapon of offence in his possession he did not think of surrendering. So, like the ancient Phemius, he made bold to stand upon terms. On condition that not a word should be said to anybody about the unlucky business in hand the crutch would be restored; otherwise it would be retained. It would profit nothing to chaffer, to make indefinite promises or suggest alternatives. And there was the utmost necessity for being prompt in reply.

Only a special dispensation of Providence saved Sandy from a fit. Did he hear aright, or was this astounding

thing a dream? The answer must have come with the swiftness of lightning, for plumping upon the ground he began with desperate fingers to unbuckle his wooden leg. It was off in a trice and singing, like a bolt from a bow, in a straight course for Evan's head. After it there went a venomous hiss as of a serpent striking. Evan dodged, the projectile reached earth, was seized and held beside the crutch. Then the captor turned to look upon the helpless and frantic foe, and was cursed, body and soul, till his spine crawled.

"Giv me pack my sticks," bellowed Sandy. "Gott tam! I will proke effery pone in your tirty pody too."

At close quarters Evan's courage might have failed, but at a distance of fifty yards the fury of the crippled dragon seemed bearable.

"I'll give you back your sticks if you promise not to tell on me," was the astute response.

Red Sandy ground his teeth as if his antagonist were between them. Let him just get his claws upon the imp of Satan! Ach! the young teffle!

Oblivious of his condition, oblivious of everything save the object of his chase, Red Sandy tried to hop on one leg, and was rewarded by a mocking peal of laughter. Drawing up abruptly and balancing himself, he endeavoured to express his sentiments; but the thing was beyond words. So he instinctively looked for a stone to brain the brat on the spot. Fate, however, was tantalising and unkind. In searching he had to stoop; haste and a passion for revenge made him bend rashly, the law of gravitation took him at a disadvantage, and in short, before his hand found a missile his nose was thrilling from violent impact with the earth.

The shock brought sudden tears to Sandy's eyes and an oath of gruesome cogency to Sandy's tongue. It likewise caused him to take his most prominent feature feelingly in his hand as if trying to discover whether it were shapeless pulp or merely hopelessly askew. Nursing it, he relieved himself by a fresh intimation of his intentions; then, ardour mastering pain, he set about rising as if deficiency of limbs were rather a help than a hindrance in an emergency. But again ill luck was upon him. Just as he was on the point of succeeding he swayed unexpectedly, recovered with a jerk, tilted to the other side, swung half



round, and, poising for half an instant on the heel of his single foot like a too venturesome acrobat, rolled incontinently on his back. Under different circumstances the spectacle of a fat man floundering like a dolphin turned upside down might have been comical, but just then its effect was to make the solitary witness shiver in the summer heat.

Sandy renewed his efforts to rise, and presently, after a mighty struggle that left him gasping and vermilion, he gained a sitting posture. The sweat stood in pearls on his face, his nose—his poor, bruised carnelian nose—sent forth rivulets of snuff, which, describing a dark circle about his mouth, dropped providently from his chin upon his shirt front, and the veins on the top of his bald head reminded the observant Evan of a collection of tiny black-puddings. He mopped himself with a big bandana handkerchief, smearing cheeks and crown in his attempts to dam the flowing nostrils and press down the swollen veins. Then the two looked at each other, steadily and speechlessly, for the space of a minute. The whole creation seemed to pause to listen and watch, so intense and electric was the silence. Evan was deafened by the drumming of pulses in his ears and frightened by the quick, hard beat of his own heart.

All at once Red Sandy spoke, and his voice had the startling detonation of an exploding bomb. Perdition! he wanted back his crutch and leg. Did the young teffle hear? With a dry mouth and icy tremors the young teffle repeated the terms of peace: he marvelled at his own audacity while the words were leaving his lips, yet he had no thought of surrendering the captured implements of war.

It seemed as if Red Sandy were going off in spontaneous combustion. But as Evan waited, breathless, for the blue flame, there came a swift and miraculous change. The hurricane of malisons ceased, the dusky-red glow faded from Sandy's face, his eyes beamed; one might have fancied he was actually trying to smile. As a matter of fact he was making the attempt, though it was not immediately successful.

"Do you know what I will pe thinking, Evan?" he inquired, bending forward in a confidential attitude; "I will pe thinking what will the neighbours say if they see this ploy?"

Opening his eyes, as if to intimate he was perfectly wide

awake, Evan answered that in all probability they would laugh and indulge in irreverent remarks; that the story would be blown abroad, would travel and be magnified.

"I will just pe thinking that," purred Sandy. "It will not pe goot for you, and it will not pe goot for me. Fuich, fuich, no! Old fools are the worst fools, except young fools; but you and me will just pe keeping things to ourselves."

His right eye closed, and he cackled knowingly.

"I see thae two Sassenach clypes coming," he went on in dulcet tones; "Sassenachs will have gey long tongues; ay, and gey tirty ones, too, whatever. But never you mind, Evan, my latt; we'll pe up to them. They have no pissiness to be keeking to the pottom of other people's wells too; sacrets iss sacrets. You'll just pe giving me pack my pits of sticks, Evan, and helping me on with that leg, and then the pull of your hand; and let long-tongued folk whistle. When a man like me sits down it will not pe fery eassy for him to rise too."

A backward glance during this speech showed Evan the cause of his own trouble and Sandy's sweetness approaching at a pace that clearly signified an interest in the proceedings. Florence, being the fleeter of foot, had outrun her nurse, and in another minute would be upon them.

"Now, Evan," pursued Sandy, in his most caressing accents, "just come with the pits of sticks, and puckle the straps for me. Your soople fingers will do it petter than mine." And Evan, gazing in amusement, thought that in vain does the fowler spread the net in the sight of any bird.

"You will pe thinking I want to catch you," cooed Sandy, "but teet no, Evan. I wass just wanting some fun this hot day, and I will have it. Ay, ay, more than wass in the pargain, a thousant times more. Now, like a goot boy, give me my pits of sticks. Just see," he exclaimed, with a note of alarm, "how fast that little cuttie will pe now."

"If I give you back your sticks will you promise?" inquired Evan, whose courage grew as the other's waned.

"What else?" answered Sandy, with his eyes on the advancing pair. "To pe shure, to pe shure. Pe fast, Evan. You're a goot poy, and a clefer poy, and if you will let the cows into the neeps, what's that? Fuich! nothing at all. I will do the same myself, onct, two hunner times—hooch, ay, two thoosant times and more."



Relenting a little under these compliments and assurances, Evan advanced to within perhaps five yards of the pleading Sandy, and set down the leg and crutch.

"There, now you can creep and get them," he said, stepping back to avoid accidents, "and then you can rise easy enough."

"Put them a wee pittie nearer, Evan," coaxed Sandy. "A wee, wee pittie. I will pe gey and pad at the creeping too."

Evan pushed the leg and crutch a yard or two nearer their owner, with an intimation that he would put them no farther, and Sandy, convinced of the folly of pleading, meekly began to crawl towards his timbers. But before his trembling hands were upon them Florence bounded up with flushed face, flying hair and hat, and a manner full of pity and concern.

"Poor old man," she cried at sight of the creeping Sandy, "is oo hurt or is oo one leg too tired to walk?"

Sandy groaned instead of answering.

This was more than flesh and blood could endure; and as certainly as the just are permitted to take vengeance upon their enemies, some one should suffer. But the scowl that darkened his face was but as a fleeting shadow upon a lake. The next instant he had clapped an extinguisher upon his anger, and was laughing as boisterously with Florence as if merriment were the sole aim of his existence. He told her what fun he had had with his goot friend Evan in consequence of the frolic of the cows among the turnips, that in sport nothing in the world served a man like a crutch, and was ready to wager his head he alone among her friends was blessed with a leg that could be put off or on at pleasure. But when she suggested he should give another exhibition of his skill in creeping and rising he had regretfully to tear himself away to keep an engagement elsewhere.

Scarcely had he turned his back when Evan, in whom the devil of mimicry was strong, proceeded to rehearse the scene with the leg and crutch so vividly and ludicrously that Florence clapped her hands and shouted for glee, and the maid laughed till she cried. Hearing the peals of laughter, Red Sandy turned once as if to say to the performer, "That is exceedingly handsome of you. Well! persevere, and Heaven help you when I come to repay the kindness."

But the Parthian arrow did not interrupt the progress of the farce, nor, when it was over and Florence was tripping away as lightly as if sorrow had never entered the world, did Evan once think of blaming her for having created an equivocal situation.

CHAPTER III

THE practice of good men proves that covenants are made to be broken. Having eagerly pledged his honour to keep a secret, Red Sandy straightway sought out Neil Macgregor to tell him all.

Neil was startled by the signs of emotion in his friend's face, and suspecting strong drink (though the hour was early), was prepared to humour him, much as Tam o' Shanter sober might have humoured Souter Johnny drunk. There was good reason for the tolerance. For half a generation the two had been very close and very drouthy cronies. If they had not been "fou for weeks thegither" they had been times innumerable more blest than kings in festive acts of fellowship. On many a memorable night they had helped each other home from Aberfourie Fair or market with violent hiccoughings, embracings, and vows of eternal brotherhood. At such times they generally drove in Sandy's gig, propping one another like a pair of leaning towers, and partly from mutual good-will, partly for greater security, one held the reins while the other manipulated the whip.

They had had accidents and adventures also to put the seal upon friendship. Half a dozen times at least they had been capsized in a way that would have broken any necks but their own; as often had the horse under mistaken applications of the lash run off with them; and they had been found hugging in a ditch by the wayside, unable to tell why they were there or what they were doing, but perfectly serene in the consciousness that they could not be better employed. It was said, moreover, that one glorious night they mistook their own identity, so that Neil drove home apologetically to Sandy's wife, and Sandy toddled to Neil's.



Both men, it is understood, recovered their wits in a twinkling, and they never repeated the mistake. Tradition cherishes the story with nods and chuckles; but then tradition is not always to be trusted. It is certain, however, that to this day when the people of the district want an illustration of perfect affection between man and man they refer, not to Jonathan and David, not to Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny, but to Sandy Dearg and the Gregarach of Pitweem.

Such memories set the cockles of the heart in a glow; and the fellow feeling which makes the convivial so wondrous kind stirred in Neil's bosom. The question was not why Sandy raved, but where he got the bad whisky. Had the tavern-keepers of Aberfourie lost their honesty, and taken to adulteration? Remembering that most of them were prominent kirk members Neil wondered whether the Session could not interfere.

But presently he began to catch glimmerings of sense in Sandy's eddying speech, and his eyes grew round and his brows arched in astonishment. Slowly, it may be a trifle reluctantly, he abandoned the hypothesis of drink, and adjusted himself to the attitude of polite sympathy becoming towards one who really seemed to have a grievance.

He took the tale of Sandy's afflictions calmly; for it is the benign office of philosophy to enable us to bear up under the misfortunes of others. Affably and sweetly conciliatory, he was as profuse of sympathy as words could be, promised to pound the culprit within an inch of his life, and ended by graciously exhibiting the well-seasoned stick that should make amends.

These civilities, so admirably calculated to assuage anger, only made Sandy fume the fiercer. Stamping upon the ground with his crutch to emphasise his words, he declared that he had not come for fine speeches or maudlin sentiment, and that he did not give the crack of his thumb for promises and the exhibition of seasoned sticks. What he wanted was indemnification for damage to his turnips, and Satan take him if he did not have it, ay, though Neil should be stripped of his last halfpenny.

Neil divined there was a spirit here worse than bad whisky, and his Celtic blood grew hot. The mumbled or frenzied menace of drunkenness he could thole with equanimity, but a threat made in downright sober earnestness

was an entirely different matter. Taking a step nearer Red Sandy, he proceeded to inform that bosom companion he was nothing but a hoary-headed impostor, that he might forthwith go to Jericho, Jerusalem, or anywhere else he liked, with his claims, his crutches, and his snuffy red nose; but as for compensation, not a sixpence should he have if he were to bellow and snort till doomsday. Whereupon, beating the ground with increased ferocity, Sandy hoped he might be consigned to everlasting flames if he went to Jericho or Jerusalem either at Neil's bidding, and that, just as surely as there were lawyers and a jail in Perth, he would have justice. Neil retorted that if it were worth while justice would be dealt out on the spot, and Sandy retaliated he had seen the day when he could soon have put a stop to boasting: whereupon, finding himself once more lapsing helplessly into the inarticulate, he turned and made off, prodding his sticks savagely into the earth as if under the impression it was Neil's head.

Neil stood watching the retreating figure as if debating whether he ought to follow and have satisfaction. "Tam his red head and his wooden shanks," he said by way of comforting himself. "To speak that way to me! I will be sorry that one of his neeps iss left." And resolving to keep the grudge warm against the next meeting, he swung about to see if there were any one handy on whom he could vent his wrath.

Meanwhile the golden afternoon wore on. The cattle, after the excitement of the raid, had lain down in serene content to chew a meditative cud; and Evan being thus temporarily free from care finished the carving of his initials on the big beech-tree. Then, as a further pastime, he took to bee-hunting; and while he revelled in slaughter and honey-bags the afternoon slipped imperceptibly into evening.

He abandoned the sport rather abruptly. Usually the sight of crimson and gold on the western hills filled him with joy, but now it oppressed him with a strange clinging sense of coming trouble; and from some odd cause the feeling of prescience was most uncomfortable in the legs.

The cattle were on their feet again, cropping with that assiduity which indicates vanishing opportunities. Nine o'clock was the milking hour, and Evan commonly erred on the side of punctuality; but this evening he tarried as if



under the spell of sunset witcheries and scenic charm till one of the maids was sent to call him. In response to her frantic waving and shouting, he set his face homeward without alacrity or gladness, as if roseate fragrance and falling dew had for once conquered hunger.

The maid waited for him, and he remarked, as he drew near, a portentous look of intelligence in her face.

"You'll catch it the night, my lad," she called encouragingly. Evan evinced his profound indifference by whistling a bar of "Johnny Cope."

"You're one of the daughters of Job's comforters, Mary," he said presently; "you're such a cheery body, and always trying to make folk glad. What's up now?"

"Oh, nothing," responded Mary, tossing her tousled head in emulation of his own unconcern. "Only that Red Sandy was having a confab with your uncle, and a stick is taken out of pickle. Maybe you can guess what it's for."

"It's beyond me," he returned, "unless it's to tickle your lazy bones, Mary." And he drove on as jauntily as if he had never fronted an inflamed face and a retributory cudgel, never been rebuked for evil behaviour.

On reaching the yard, however, his demeanour underwent a swift change. The ominous quiet oppressed him; everything had a haunted, suspicious look, and he stepped warily, as if dreading a hundred ambushes. His glance into shadows was quick and furtive, and he went stealthily and wide-eyed round corners. Once at a rustle that other ears would scarce have heard, he wheeled with such exceeding celerity that Mary asked if he had fitted his feet with pivots and was showing off. To his surprise, he was permitted to reach the byre unmolested.

One by one, with assaults, counter-assaults, snortings, thrustings and tossing of heads, the cows crushed through the door, but the bull lingered. He stood a little apart, with the lordly air of a beast fully cognisant of the great fact that the world is dominated by brute force. This consciousness had of late been leading him to indulge in questionable familiarities, especially towards timorous strangers. Neil had threatened a ring in the nose, but that extreme measure was postponed from time to time, pending a definite outrage. When he should kill or seriously maim somebody in his playfulness it would probably be adopted.



At present he had a calculating eye upon Mary, as if trying to decide in what part of her graceful person he could most effectively deliver a charge. Evan noticed the look and warned her to be off. She obeyed with a little scream of horror, which the bull cheerily accepted as a challenge. With a responsive roar and a flourish of the tail, he sprang in pursuit, but he had scarcely gone five yards when the nimble Mary popped into a convenient building, banging the door behind her.

Now, it chanced that in that very moment Neil Macgregor appeared in the barn door, and the bull losing the maid impartially turned his attention to the master. Before Neil could realise the posture of affairs, before indeed he could withdraw his hands from the well-like pockets of his breeches, he had turned a somersault back through the barn door and was head foremost in a mass of straw inside. Seeing his master tossed, Bob Conacher, the first ploughman, rushed from the stable with a pitchfork, and returned with the broken shaft in his hand and a beating terror in his heart lest the bull should follow and rip up the horses. Disdaining such game, the bull turned with a bleeding nose and the crest of a conqueror to look for a fresh antagonist. He had not a moment to wait. At the other end of the other yard Jamie Tosh, the second ploughman, appeared with a huge hoe, and in a twinkling he too was gone, leaving the fragments of his weapon behind him.

By this time the clamour had reached the dwelling-house, for the present given up to Mr. Leonard Dudley and his family, who had come with the swallows from the English midlands. How she managed it no one knew, but little Florence, escaping the vigilance of her nurse, slipped from the front door, across the lawn, and through a side gate leading to the steading, to investigate matters for herself. Spying the fluttering white dress of the child, the bull threw his nozzle in the air and sniffed as if unable to credit such temerity; the next instant the shaggy head went down and the buildings reverberated as the brute roared and charged.

Luckily Evan was at the end of the yard nearest the garden. Seizing Florence, he whisked her back through the gate and into a clump of rhododendrons, where she crouched screaming with fright and resentment. Hurriedly telling her to keep still and for her life not to venture out again, he darted to his place in the yard, his face very white,

fur come had drawn blood from his he
to take his revenge on the dog Evan le
him by the tail, began to ply the switch
The bull wheeled again, Evan lost h
swinging, partly dragging, was whirled
. Tweed took the bull by the nose and
air for his pains, but the momentary ha
regain his feet, and the switch went out
a knotted lash.

Meanwhile Florence's cries had brougl
hold, male and female, demanding in
voice if she were killed outright.

"No, but the wild bull is tilling E
through her sobs; and as she spoke a
gave confirmation to her words.

"Good heavens! the brute is goring th
Dudley, rushing into the yard. But he w
had made shivers of his switch and w
bigger stick, which Jamie Tosh was vainl
give him. Perceiving at a glance how
Dudley ran quickly forward, snatched th
the trembling and over-prudent Jamie,
bull, dexterously thrust it into Evan's ha
it gripped than it fell with a whack that
like a goat and bellow in pain, and wit
dash for the byre, dragging Evan after
peared. Fearing a tragedy, Mr. Dudley h



"Are you hurt?" asked Mr. Dudley, peering into the perfumed duskiness.

"No, sir," answered Evan from some recess among the fragrant stalls. "He is all right now, sir," he added, emerging from between two cows, after a passage under half-a-dozen noses. "Is Miss Florence hurt, sir?"

"Not hurt, thanks to you, my brave boy," replied Mr. Dudley, placing a hand on the lad's shoulder. "Just a little frightened—that is all. But are you sure you are not hurt?"

"No, sir, not a bit," said the panting Evan, and then he added with a little laugh, "Gosh, sir, the bull gave us some fine fun."

The frivolous remark was not allowed to pass unchallenged.

"It will pe fine fun, I suppose, if your uncle will pe killed," retorted a familiar voice; and looking up, Evan encountered the rebuking eye of his aunt.

The mention of Neil reminded them that he had not been seen since his acrobatic performance in the barn, and in a body they went to search for him. They found him seated on a bottle of straw scratching his head vaguely and ruminating on the unaccountable action of the bull.

"Oh, Neil, Neil, will you pe killed altogether?" cried his wife at sight of him.

Neil looked up and tried to smile.

"It will pe all right, Lisspeth," he said. "Ay, ay, perfeckly right."

"I hope you are not seriously hurt, Mr. Macgregor," said Mr. Dudley.

"Oh, ay, just a wee thocht, sir," answered Neil, running his hand over his right hip. "Am shure I do not know what will pe in the peast's head at all too. Has he killed anybody?"

"Nobody, thank Heaven!" replied Mr. Dudley.

"An' that iss a goot thing, too," observed Neil.

"But he might very well have killed or hurt some one," pursued Mr. Dudley, "had it not been for the pluck of your young nephew here."

Neil examined Evan slowly and critically, as if casting eyes on him for the first time.

"Oh, ay," he said at length. "Evan iss not the poy to pe afraid. You see, sir," he added in explanation, "they will

pe procht up together, as ye may say, the pull and him, and the pull will neffer got the upper hand."

Then a curious expression came into his face, and he said very quietly, "Red Sandy wass telling me the cows will pe in his neeps again. He was going to have at me, and I told him he will just petter try. You see, sir, Red Sandy is awful hot and quarrelsome whiles. But then, what will pe the use of laying hands on the crater with his wooden leg?"

They helped Neil to his feet, and it was found he limped.

"Am shure I do not know what the wild prute will pe thinking on anyway," he murmured, as Lisspeth and Mr. Dudley supported him to a chair by the chimney cheek. "He neffer will do the like of this to me in all his life pefore."

CHAPTER IV

In spite of a brave exterior and many self-assurances of composure, it was with tremulous nerves and a scant appetite that Evan sat down to supper. The spoon shook in his right hand, there was no taste in his palate, and so disproportionate a share of the porridge and milk shot past his mouth into his bosom that one of the maids offered to fit him with a bib. With a bitter retort he threw down his spoon, seized his cap, and hastened forth. He had no definite object in view, but the vague unrest urged him to seek a change of scene and company, and instinct led him to his father's cottage, which was distant from the farmstead about a third of a mile. So tense was his preoccupation that he had walked half the way before discovering whither he was bound.

It was Saturday night, and David Kinlock and his daughter Jessie were, according to custom, busily preparing for Sunday. David, in shirt sleeves, sat gingerly on the edge of a chair beside a sputtering tallow candle, engaged, as it appeared, in the extraordinary diversion of making faces at a cracked and battered mirror, which took revenge for the indignity by distorting his countenance out of all human semblance; and the more hideously the glass caricatured the more determinedly David grimaced. But he was not



indulging in any pantomimic pastime. On the contrary, the winking, screwing, and twisting were evidence of the grimmest of purposes. For the good man was deep in the critical enterprise of shaving; and the light being bad, the razor blunt, the mirror treacherous, the stubby beard obdurate, it was almost as if he were undergoing a surgical operation in the dark. Accompanying the contortions came frequent soughs of alarm, telling that the recreant blade took more than the beard. David bled like a martyr in these weekly ordeals, but he bore them uncomplainingly for the sake of a clean face on the morrow. Had he been better versed in the ways of the world he would have shaved comfortably by the light of the sun on Sunday morning, but having only the Bible for his guide he would rather have gone hairy all his days than have desecrated the Sabbath by using a razor.

While her father was thus painfully denuding his chin, Jessie was on her knees scrubbing the deal floor. Both suspended operations as Evan entered; David with the levelled razor high in his right hand, and Jessie with a streaming cloth resting on the edge of her pail.

The eyes with which they met him were full of inquiry, not untouched by apprehension. They had seen him at midday, for both worked on the farm; later they had learned, with sickening sensations, of the raid of the cattle and Red Sandy's interview with Neil, and had suffered torments of speculation in consequence. But they knew nothing of the momentous events of the evening, having left for home as early as half-past eight o'clock. Swift of intuition, however, they guessed that something fresh was amiss, not less from the ostentatious jauntiness of Evan's manner than the unexpectedness of his visit.

Evan took a seat blithely by the fire, and the household work was resumed without questionings. The scrubbing done, Jessie strewed the floor with golden sand that grated and crunched under foot: on the morrow morning it would be swept into the ash-pit, and the boards would gleam whiter than new-sawn wood. Then she stirred the fire, on which a kettle was crooning a song of invitation. Remembering recent deprivations, Jessie inquired of her brother whether he thought he could manage a cup of tea after his porridge. He thought he could; at least, he had never known himself to fail in that kind of enterprise, and in any case he was ready to try. Accordingly, by the time David



had finished shaving, three fragrant cups were steaming on the table beside a plate of delectable scones and a pot of home-made black-currant jam.

Evan, whose appetite had suddenly revived in contact with these delicacies, almost regretted that religion prescribed a grace on such occasions; he listened, it is to be feared, a trifle impatiently to the protracted blessing invoked by his father, and hardly had "Amen" sounded when he fell to with a heartiness which assuredly did not suggest trouble. David drank his tea and lit his pipe, preferring the soothing effects of tobacco to jam and scone, and from the midst of a cloud of smoke gazed with a tender, passionate wistfulness at his boy.

David loved his son not less because of late there had been multiplying charges against him, and certainly not less because they were all compelled to eat their bread in the sore sweat of their brows. Nay, in the bottom of his heart David cherished an invincible pride in him. He knew that Evan was both clever and courageous. Again and again had the boy's brightness and intrepidity been proved; and trying, with the pathetic instinct of a father, to leap the years and anticipate the doings of Time and Fate, David audaciously imagined that possibly Evan might escape the plough-stilts, the wet, the mire, the drudgery, the rheumatism, and the penury which are the ultimate portion of the jolly plough-boy. Nay, more, as the dreamer's imagination soared, he saw the house of Kinloch rise like a glorious phœnix from crumbling ruins by the efforts of the much-blamed Evan. For the Kinlochs had once been people of substance and blood. Upon a time, not so long past, they had counted their flocks by the thousand, their herds by the score; had kept their gig, killed their fatted calf for the feast, and been objects of conspicuous regard at kirk-meeting, fair, and social gathering.

But somehow the trick of success was lost. There came evil times—droughty or rainy seasons, spoiled crops, inadequate prices, a plague among sheep and cattle; and one day the country-side awoke to the discovery that David Kinloch was ruined. Discredited before the world, his judgment and his company lost their value and attraction; social assemblies recked not of his absence, his old friends passed him in their gigs with scarce a nod of recognition, and for the eldership that was in the wind another was



chosen. With admirable far-sighted policy the kirk concluded that one who fails utterly in the things of time cannot safely be trusted with the things of eternity. And, indeed, when you come to think of it, would it not be the rankest impudence in poverty to presume to minister to the soul of wealth? The Master preached against money; but we live in another age. It no longer excites surprise to see the camel clear the eye of a needle, nor to find the bursting purse procure salvation. The fable of Lazarus and the rich man has long since lost its moral.

Having once got her hand upon David, Fate did not spare. That he might suffer exquisitely in the tender places of the soul bereavement followed hard on the flight of riches. His wife, a woman as lovely in her life as in her person, sank into an early grave, heart-broken, people said, and a boy of three, sweet as a visiting angel, was soon laid beside her. The loss drew David closer to the two who remained; but he did not forget the two who were gone: no fear of that. In the holy of holies wherein stricken men keep their beloved they lived on, ever young and fair and happy, enshrined in a kind of radiant immortality. Suns rolled, moons waxed and waned, seasons came and went, trouble pressed and toil wore, but they changed not. Time, which crooks the back, and furrows the face, and palsies the arm of the strongest fighter, had no power upon them. Safe from its blights and frosts, they rejoiced in a perpetual summer, an auroral freshness and rosiness as of the first dewy dawn; and often in the still watches of the night, when the worn and brooding David should have slept, they would break upon his mental vision like glorified beings from another sphere beckoning him away. He longed for them, mourned for them, yet thanked Heaven fervently they had been taken home before the heat and burden of the day could fall upon them. It spared them the aching weariness, the dim eyes, and the heavy feet that would have been their lot had they stayed: it was so much better, he told himself, to depart in the brightness of morning than among the clouds of evening or tempests of the dark night. Their luminous memories were a flame in his heart, at once heat and light; and more and more he dwelt upon their perfect love, their beautiful unstained youth, as the time drew on when he should be summoned to join them. Thus in the dead of night he saw them waiting for him with clasped



hands and shining faces in the portico of the House Beautiful.

When they went he was down, far down, broken in spirit as well as in fortune. For eleven long years his lot had been one of incessant manual toil; and for eight of these he had served his brother-in-law, Neil Macgregor, for little wages and less thanks. Had he dared to formulate a philosophy based upon personal experience he would have warned mankind against the charity of relatives as a thing colder than the snows of Greenland; but he had no philosophy, and so he held his peace.

It was remarked by those who never endured his trials that he lacked energy, that though fallen and grievously crushed he might have risen and fought on, as if the maimed soldier recked not of hurts. David heard these things, and made neither reply nor comment. In its own good time Heaven would judge, and set the balance right to a hair. What was said in the interim might be cruel, might be unjust, but would not affect the judgment.

Shrewd people observed that Evan was not the least like his father either in mind or person, and the down-trodden David prayed ardently that as father and son differed in gifts, in looks and in temperament, so they might also differ in fortune.

Meanwhile Evan was engaged with an energy that signified complete absorption in the present. Scones and jam disappeared at such a rate that Jessie was constrained to remark the supply of porridge must have been scanty that evening.

"No," said Evan, valorously trying to chew and talk at the same time. "There's always plenty of it, only it's all lumps: your teeth stick in them just as if they were paste; and the milk is the colour of a new scythe and sour enough to pickle onions. Aunt told me the other day that sour things are good for the stomach. If that's true," he added, ladling more jam on his bread, "mine should be in fine trim. Goodness knows when it had sweet milk to hurt it. As for the bread, you might as well try to eat cotton-cake. Jamie nearly choked on a bit of it yesterday, and when he was black in the face and gaping at the ceiling, aunt said she could endure anything but gluttony. Oh, yes," he commented with the gravity of sixty, "pease-bread is fine and lasty: they haven't baked for a fortnight, and I think what we have will do for a fortnight more."



He chuckled contentedly, and his father wondered at the exuberance of the heart that could make a jest of its hardships. That had never been one of his own gifts.

"And yesterday, too," continued the narrator gleefully, "Bob asked for a tattie-masher, as the lumps were too much for him, and he said that if they gave him the water and the milk separate he would mix them to suit himself. That was a bar. Aunt was on him like Tweed on a cat. And Bob said, Well, then, it wasn't in his bargain to chew lumps and he thought the cows had a little too much help from the pump. And aunt fired up and said the folk who were too saucy for lumpy porridge could just wait for an appetite. And as for the milk, it would stand for the time to come till it was solid; maybe that would please him. 'Anything for a change,' said Bob. Gosh, if you saw her then! I thought she was going to knock him down and dance on him."

He smacked his lips and laughed again; for the scones and jam were good and the recollections of his aunt's choler ticklingly comical. Then, after a brief pause, he passed to the incidents of the evening.

His father and sister set themselves to listen with serious faces, for they expected an oft-repeated tale of faults and scoldings. But their gravity vanished swiftly in beams and gurglings of mirth. Evan had never been so entertaining. He had evidently discharged his mind of all disagreeable memories for the better accommodation of the ludicrous. At any rate he was facetious with an abandon and a power of infection rare even in one who was humorous and dramatic by instinct. The rampant bull, the scampering men and women, the meditative Neil on his bottle of straw, the distressed yet pugnacious Lisspeth were described and mimicked as by another Foote more mischievous than the first. He was irresistible; and the auditors had to laugh it out in spite of a lurking consciousness that merriment was unfeeling and improper.

When the recital was over and the listeners had drawn a breath of relief David cautiously introduced the events of the day. Evan was unequivocally frank. The cows, he owned, had again transgressed; but he was happy to report they had been punished in a way that was likely to prove salutary. It was undeniable too that Red Sandy had been foamingly angry; but he had been placated, indeed had



himself sued for peace. Why he should subsequently have gone like a tell-tale girl to Neil Macgregor was a matter which Evan could not explain. All he could do was to express disgust with conduct so heinously dishonourable.

In the reaction a racking anxiety fell upon David. Evan was sorely to blame. He had been guilty of gross disobedience, and, greater enormity still, of a quarrel that would not be forgiven. For the fault of letting the cows into Red Sandy's turnips he might, if he were meek and penitent, be pardoned; but for bringing Neil and Sandy to a rupture, never. David felt as one treading blindly on explosives, and shuddered to think of the consequences.

Sucking a dead pipe, he gazed intently at Evan. Why could he not be like other boys, why could he not be docile, and dull, and pliant? Of what profit was it to have unusual qualities of brightness, hardiness, and independence, if they were to lead to perpetual disaster? Yet watching the gay and buoyant culprit David felt no disposition to seize the occasion for admonition or rebuke. In spite of many sorrows, or perhaps because of them, it was a fine thing to see the invincible joyousness of the young heart, the unabashed spirit, gushing forth in pure exuberance of fun. Time would soon enough lay its frosty hand on the light springs of jollity.

David rose abruptly and went out. The glimmering splendours of the summer night clothed the world as in a lustrous raiment. The soft air was sensuous with the mingled odours of clover, bluebell, thyme, and honeysuckle, of wild rose and sweetbriar, of birch and oak and pine. The hills crowded round in eternal vigil, dark, silent, impassive witnesses of the fleeting generations. About their feet the woods clustered like draperies, sable adornments that often in the eerie midnight sobbed and wailed like lost souls, or threshed like a million flails, and again whispered things that tongues may not speak. And upward, whither David loved to lift his eyes, was the glory of the changeless stars.

David knew nothing of the science of the heavens save what his Bible taught him. The magnitude of those lambent points, the rolling systems, the flashing suns, the measureless spaces were not things within the sphere of his knowledge. But of the peace shed from those gracious heights he knew more than most astronomers. To-night it laid strong hold upon him, bringing him into quick and

tranquil possession of his soul. The sense of the transient and the trivial slipped from him like a discarded garment. Encompassed by the Omnipotent, Infinite, and Eternal, why should he be dismayed or cast down?

> " Let nothing disturb thee,
> Let nothing affright thee;
> All passeth,
> God only remainth."

The truth was as vividly real to David as the hills about him, as the heavens above him. His breast swelled with a kind of awed exultation. Travail, bondage, the sore heart, the weary spirit, said the still, small voice, are not for ever, and Calvary is not the end.

David turned aside to the gate of a hay-field and leaned over. The sound of running water, the sweetest in nature, fell soothingly on his ear, the scent of hay was in his nostrils, the quiet of the great night on his mind.

The scene was still with the stilllness of deep repose. A dog barked and was silent, as if oppressed by the loneliness; an ox lowed dolefully, accentuating the silence; from below came the humming monologue of the river, from above the fluctuating noise of cascades, and just at hand rose the tinkling undertone of the brook.

David seemed set on a height whence he had wide, clear views. His life rose before him as in a vision, not ghastly nor grisly, but softly, sweetly, full of beneficence and blessing. The years were reversed, and, with a kind of awful joy, he re-tasted early happiness. Unknowingly, he lifted his cap, and the gentle night wind fondled his thin grey hair; and he forgot that it was either thin or grey.

Under the influence of some mystic spell he looked skyward again. The brilliancy of the stars had increased; they were fraught with a new meaning, a sort of burning solicitude. In their palpitations he saw yearning eyes, glorified, beatific faces, till it seemed the whole inhabited heavens looked down in love and cheer.

"God sees all, and God is good," he said in his heart.

He stood for a little in mute adoration, lost, as it were, in infinitude; then, recalling his soaring senses, he returned to the house.

"You'll stay with us to-night, Evan," he said. "I'll see



that you are up in good time in the morning." And Evan made haste to signify assent.

Then was enacted the scene which Scotland's poet has described as Scotland's peculiar glory. The big Bible came down from its shelf, and David read of the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and the crown which Job won. And, the reading done, the nightly song was uplifted:

"O God of Bethel! by whose hand
Thy people still are fed,
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led,

"Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace;
God of our fathers, be the God
Of their succeeding race."

The prayer which followed was long, and, I am sorry to say, Evan slept; but, remembering that he had been seventeen hours afoot, his father again forbore to chide. Half an hour later he was asleep for the night; but David lay long awake, full of thoughts that could not be uttered. On the morrow, however, when making the bed, Jessie partially understood them from the stains on the pillow.

CHAPTER V

On Sunday Pitweem remembered the fourth Commandment and rested from its labours. Evan and the maids, indeed, enjoyed the uninterrupted benefits of early rising, for on Sunday as on Monday the cows had to be milked and got off to pasture while the grass was yet sweet with dew.

But at the usual hour of turning out the men merely turned over, snuggling among the delicious blankets (cosier at cock-crow than at any other time) with a voluptuous sense of luxury and a blessing on the Christian religion for its tolerance of the natural inclinations of the lazy. Not until seven did they tumble into the stable with mop-heads, gaping mouths, unlaced boots, and a general air of griev-

ance and dishevelment, to treat the whinnying horses to blows, bad language, and a wisp of hay. That done, the most venerable and docile of the lot was groomed and harnessed for the kirk. It was a process which invariably called for more unsabbatical language, and a most unorthodox use of the curry-comb.

At half-past ten precisely on every Sabbath morning on which the strath did not happen to be in possession of driving snow or pelted by hail or rain, Neil Macgregor and Mrs. Neil stepped ceremoniously into a vehicle known as "the machine." This chariot was a triumph of local art. The creation of an inspired amateur in carriage building, it had all the qualities which are adverse to graceless pride and vanity of line. It was as heavy as a cart, angular, ugly, and springless, and, in general, admirably designed to defeat the ends of those who might be bent on easy attitudes. In this machine the family jolted decorously to church, doing the four miles to Aberfourie in an hour and a quarter, so as to have time to take part in the sanctifying gossip which generally preceded the service. The friendly practice of thus discussing the recent births, death, and marriages in the district, the crops, the weather, and the scandals, attuned the minds of the congregation for the rousing discourse which followed from the Rev. Murdoch Macnair. The Rev. Murdoch was accounted a most moving preacher, his sermons on eternal punishment in particular being the terror of the unawakened.

On these Sabbath excursions, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Neil and his wife. The good man himself appeared in superfluities of sky-blue linen, that had a tendency to flop about the neck like the ears of an elephant, a black stock well glazed with use, shining broadcloth, a fifteen-year-old beaver, and Blucher boots that threatened to last for ever. But he was eclipsed by his spouse. That estimable lady made a sensational appearance in a crinoline so expansive that Evan likened her to an inverted balloon, a silk dress of extreme stiffness and antique fashion, and an enormous coal-scuttle bonnet, which protruded above her countenance like incredible eaves.

All this splendour required room, and with Neil it was often a matter of delicate calculation how "the machine" was to accommodate the crinoline and the troop of Macgregor cherubs with which his wife liked to surround her-



self on Sunday. There were half a score of these olive shoots to hand on the parental virtues—four boys and six girls. Thrice they came in couples, and Lisspeth owned that the Lord was uncommonly good to the household in the matter of children, but Neil was heard to hint ungratefully that he did not mind if the blessing were curtailed, and that if it were the will of Heaven he would be perfectly content with one at a time. His wife, who held scriptural ideas about the teeming vine, very properly rebuked him for such sentiments, referring the impious man to Psalm cxxvii. and 5. Blinking and chuckling to himself, Neil replied that the good King David was not to be taken too seriously on matters of that sort; that he may have been ironical or possibly made the statement for ends of his own. Whereupon Mrs. Macgregor, aghast with horror, desired to know what infidelities were afoot now. But Neil merely remarked jocosely, "That will pe atween ourselves, Lisspeth, my lass. It will pe all right, and David will pe a gey man for the leddies."

The Sunday following Red Sandy's outbreak and the bull's escapades, Mr. and Mrs. Macgregor went to church according to custom. They took three of the cherubs with them, yet, in spite of this and the fact that Lisspeth's crinoline seemed blown to unusual dimensions, room was made in "the machine" for David and Jessie, who had long since mastered the knack of squeezing themselves into odd corners, as if they were a kind of patent upholstery designed to save the bones of their betters.

It was a day of buoyant sunshine, of laughing water and whispering winds, a day of peace, a day of rich promise to the farmer, in short, a day to attune the mind to devotion; and the party went off in a mood of complacent readiness to profit by the ministrations of the Rev. Murdoch Macnair.

Then the idle horses were turned out to graze with the cattle, the delivery into Evan's keeping being effected with much sage advice and manifold injunctions. He listened with an odd, ambiguous expression, but he said nothing to rouse suspicion, and the ploughmen having discharged an onerous duty returned to the bothy to snooze and discuss the lasses.

But Master Dugald Macgregor remained wide awake. According to the certificate of his birth Dugald was barely thirteen, but in vulpine cunning and curiosity and the vir-



tues which attend upon or flow from these he was at least fifty. His irreverent cousin had called him an old wife in kilts, and he treasured the affront against a convenient time of reckoning.

Well aware where vigilance was likeliest to tell, Dugald slipped quietlly to the back of a stone dyke, whence by judicious peeping he could observe all that passed in the beech-tree field while remaining himself invisible. He meant only to spy, to note defections, and report. But what he saw made him forget policy, leap the wall at a bound, and rush into the open, vociferating at the pitch of his voice. For there in the broad sunlight of a Sunday afternoon was the miscreant Evan careering around the pasture on the fleetest of the horses as if training for a steeple-chase. Attracted by the cries, he turned and galloped towards his cousin, deftly using a switch on each side of his courser's head in lieu of a bridle, and shouting boisterously.

"You get another horse, Dugal," he cried, as he tore up, "and we'll have a race; it's the finest fun I ever had; and I'll bet a fairin' at the next market I can beat you."

But the sedate and prudent Dugald was not to be seduced.

"Maybe you'll have fun you don't like when I tell my father," he replied.

Evan, who had managed to halt, looked him over very deliberately; then dismounted to consider matters.

"You'll not have a ride?" he said.

"No," returned Dugald emphatically, "the horses are not here for riding."

Evan scrutinised him again quietly and scornfully.

"Well, you are a fine old Cailleach," observed the critic slowly. "I can't think why you're not in petticoats, you're so good at the telling. But take care that your tongue does not get too long for your mouth; we might have to clip it, and that would be bad."

Many a lad would have flown into a passion; Dugald merely added an inch to his dignity.

"You'll just better let the horses a-be," he said loftily, "and do what I tell you."

The unregenerate Evan responded with a burst of satirical laughter.

"Do what you tell me!" he cried. "Gosh, man, that would be fine! Do what my Lord Dugal Macgregor tells



me. But let me whisper something in your big ear. I'm taking care of the horses, and I'll ride them if I like. Mind that I said that when you come to the telling business."

"I'd just like to see you try it," said Dugald, secure in the thought that he was his father's son.

"My Lord Dugal Macgregor will be pleased for once," answered Evan promptly. And calling Tweed he drove the horses into a corner, darted in among them, gripped one by the forelock and nose before it could avail itself of its heels, and leading it to a bank sprang upon its back. The next minute he was circling the field as hard as hoof could go; in another he was back exultant to inquire how Dugald liked the pace.

"You just wait," said that young gentleman losing his dignity in vexation, "you'll catch it."

"You're running a big risk of catching it first," retorted Evan, making his horse curvette and dance threateningly about Dugald. "Now, I'm going off for another little canter, and if you're not out of this when I come back, by George there'll be such a tallo-ho as you never saw in your life. We'll see what kind of a fox you'll make, and that will be more for you to tell."

Before the other could answer a word he caught the horse smartly across the tips of the ears with the switch and was off as if to take a battery or cut down a regiment all by himself. Dugald stood watching in a maze of wonder and chagrin, not untouched, perhaps, by admiration. The speed was beyond anything of which he had believed a clumsy cart-horse capable. He could imagine it all a dream—that jumble of flying feet, streaming mane, and low craned head, with the evil sprite atop plying his demon switch. But he could in nowise fancy it a dream when the evil sprite returned at a charging pace with the clear intention of riding him down.

Then he remembered the discretion which is the better part of valour and took to his heels. They would have served him better, however, had he taken to them a little sooner. He had not gone three hundred yards when Evan was upon him with the whoops and brandishings of a Red-face warrior out for tomahawk practice. Nimble of foot as a mountain goat, Dugald dodged and doubled with amazing quickness, but his dexterity merely whetted the enemy's appetite for sport. A score of times the fugitive



cried out with his heart in his mouth, as the horse, his own father's horse, wheeled and bobbed about him with open jaws or the rider made a feint of slashing off his head; and the direr his plight the louder rang the jeers and laughter of his assailant.

The frolic, which was fast resolving itself into an aggravated assault, might have ended in incurable hurts, had not Dugald opportunely come to a wall, over which he blindly flung himself. Unhappily he landed in the midst of a lusty bed of brambles: the shock, the fright, the pain of thorns in the flesh, and, above all, the mortification, put the remnant of his self-possession to rout, and he fairly screeched, breaking at the same time into a flood of angry tears.

"Man, that was a grand skelloch," called Evan from the back of the jibbing horse. "It's fine to have your hurdies kittled with bramble-bushes, isn't it? Just lie quiet and have a good greet; it will make you better." Whereupon he wheeled and rode off with a resounding laugh of mockery.

All at once a sense of inhumanity smote him, and he felt chill with undefined alarm. The next instant he was off his galloping charger and running back to Dugald, who still lay sobbing resentfully.

"Wait, Dugal, I'll pull you out," he cried, clearing the wall at a leap. His face and manner were full of contrition; his voice was soft and solicitous. Dugald looked up, suspending his tears in surprise; but immediately recognising his opportunity he wept with redoubled energy.

"Let me get a catch of you," said Evan. "I know it is awful sore to be stuck in bramble-bushes with a kilt," he added compassionately. "There, now, don't greet. It was all fun."

Laying hold of Dugald's kilt-tail he pulled with all his might; the clutching briars tore Dugald's bare legs and he shrieked till the woods rang. Evan dropped the kilt-tail with an uncomfortable feeling of warmth. He had not counted upon these complications, and he detested blubbering.

"What made you get in here?" he demanded testily. "One would think you were a daft sheep to get tangled like this. Keep quiet and I'll cut the dirty things."

Whipping out his knife, he began to slash away the



grasping brambles, greatly to the detriment of his own fingers; and presently, after much groaning and complaining, and not without suffering additional damage, Dugald was dragged to his feet. The spectacle he presented as he stood lowering at Evan was not one of grace. His face was swollen and scratched, his clothes were rent, his legs bleeding, and in general he looked as if he had been lacerated, rolled, pounded, and then violently shaken out again. Evan could not help making a comparison.

"Do you know, Dugal," he said, "you're just like a Skye terrier after a fight with Tweed."

"Ay," said Dugald, with compressed lips. "Well, we'll see who'll be likest a Skye terrier in an hour."

Choosing to ignore the threat, Evan wiped his cousin's wounds with the lining of his jacket, having no fitter surgical appliance at hand; that done, he helped the sulking Dugald over the wall and set him in the way for home.

"I would go with you," said the physician tenderly, "if it wasn't for the cows getting into Red Sandy's turnips. Are you better?"

"No," answered Dugald sullenly.

"Ah, well!" responded Evan, "if you wash your face nobody will know you have been greetin', and as for the scratches, look at that." He tucked up his kilt, displaying a pair of intricately scarred legs. "Worse than yours," he laughed. "Man, I have got fifty scrapes for one feed of rasps."

"I don't care if you had a hundred," hissed Dugald, beginning to move away. "But I'll tell you this, you'll catch it. This will be a dear day to you."

And Evan had to confess to himself that probably the intelligence was correct.

CHAPTER VI

MILKING time came and the cows were driven home. Then the church-goers arrived, and Dugald hastened forth with tell-tale eagerness to meet them. It was plain at a glance that he had studiously disregarded Evan's advice about the use of water. Like the distinguished Dr. Slop upon a cele-



brated occasion, he went out "unwiped, unanointed, unaneled, and with all his stains and blotches on him." Evan stood in the byre door looking on with affected carelessness, but the quick beating of his heart seemed to indicate that his interest in the proceedings was keener than he cared to own.

The tale of his grievance poured from Dugald like water from a spout. He was not usually voluble, nor had he the least talent for narrative, but when personally concerned he could, like Othello, tell a plain tale convincingly. In the present instance, too, his looks were an effective aid to his tongue, and when words failed he promptly fell back on the potent expedient of the eyes.

"Of course he must greet," commented Evan to himself, growing hot in his unconcern. "One would think he was half killed."

Hurt within an inch of his life was the thought of Mrs. Macgregor. At sight of her darling's stained and battered countenance, his draggled clothes and crimson legs, she was so overcome with maternal emotion that she must needs scream and essay a flying leap from "the machine." But an abnormally stout lady in abnormal crinolines does not vault in such a situation with impunity. Mrs. MacGregor's dilated skirt caught fast on the bar of the dashboard, down went her head and up her heels, as if there were a swivel at her waist, and the onlookers were horrified by the sight of an inverted lady flouncing in the midst of a chaos of spreading petticoats.

Finding herself thus incontinently swinging between heaven and earth wrong end down, Lisspeth desperately embraced a hind leg of the horse, and the animal, put out by the unaccustomed familiarity, made as if to bolt. David Kinloch and Jamie Tosh threw themselves on its head together, while Neil and Jessie hastened to give their attention to Lisspeth. Her position, dangerous as it was delicate, made it hard to render effective aid. But as something must be done quickly, Neil seized her by the shoulders, and Jessie, scrambling back into the machine, strove to reef the tossing petticoats. Simultaneously the screeching maids butted each other in the frantic but mistaken belief they were somehow helping their mistress.

Under the influence of a performance so novel and exhilarating, the horse, though usually a very Rozinante in gravity

and sobriety of conduct, seemed inspired by all the fiends of mischief. It reared, it plunged, it threw about its head so that the heads of the struggling David and Jamie knocked together, and, finally, to crown its deviltry, it set with all its might to the game of demolishing the dashboard, perfectly regardless of the circumstance that Lisspeth chanced to be in the way.

"Look, look, he'll knock her brains out!" cried David in consternation.

"Gott pless me!" responded Neil, dropping his wife and darting at a flying fetlock. He had the secret of that outward jerk of the limb which never fails to bring a flinging horse to its senses, and in a twinkling the animal was shivering and groaning on three legs.

"Will you stand still?" said Neil from between his clenched teeth, "or will you want it wrenched off too?" A lurch of the horse sent his beaver over his eyes, and he added ferociously, "Tam you for on uckly prute peast. I will pull you to pits, then." He gave another twist so savage, so sudden, so strong, that the trembling horse nearly lost its balance. "Kick now," said Neil; but the horse only trembled the more.

All this while Mrs. Macgregor was slung like a sack to the side of "the machine." They were unable to give her much assistance, for to be freed she must be hoisted, and to hoist her was a matter of block and pulley. But what they could not do her own dead weight accomplished. Under the pressure of her solid fifteen stones the bar went rip through hoop-skirt and silk dress, and Mrs. Macgregor, who vaguely suggested to the now fascinated Evan a hanging turkey with outspread wings, came down in a heap with a cry that at last she was killed outright. Hastily pulling her clear of horse and vehicle, Neil set her on her feet, with the remark that she was not quite dead. Facing him, with the clothes slipping from her fat shoulders, her bonnet askew and her hair falling, she dared him to deny that she had got her death blow. Too prudent to argue, Neil said he was grieved to hear it, and set himself to adjust her dress.

The disaster to his mother had interrupted Dugald's lamentations, but no sooner was she in a condition to give ear again than he broke out afresh. She was a fond mother, and, forgetting her own wrongs and indignities, she folded him passionately to her breast without being in the least



aware of the nature of his affliction. Presently, however, she gathered that Evan was at the bottom of it, and the fury of the pythoness seized her.

"Pity on me that will haff the like of you about me," she screamed, shaking her clenched fist at the byre door. "Iss there nopody that will take a rung and preak his pones?" she demanded in a general appeal.

As no one seemed disposed to undertake the commission, she dropped the blubbering Dugald and darted across the yard, shedding petticoats and flounces indiscriminately by the way. Jessie followed, meekly gathering them up, and Evan retreated into the byre. As his aunt stormed through the door he was snuggling under the bull's nose, the only safe refuge in Pitweem.

"Come out of that," she cried, catching sight of him. "Come out and just let me get my fingers on you."

But as that was precisely what Evan most wished to avoid, he only crouched the closer. The bull nosed him in surprise and satisfaction, then turned round as though to say "Touch him if you dare." There seemed a challenge also in the eye that peered at her from beneath the snuffing nozzle.

The defiance turned Lisspeth's passion to frenzy. With tears of rage in her eyes and gestures that made it perilous to be near her, she called upon Neil to probe the sinner from his hole that she might get her will with him just for the space of two minutes. At the end of that time, she thought, he would be in need of no further correction. The energy of the good lady's gesticulations had alarming effects upon her apparel. The coal-scuttle bonnet bobbed at the small of her back, her hair was in a mass about her ears, and the antique silk dress, unbuttoning by degrees at the chest, slipped stealthily down as if to exhibit her in all the terrors of nudity. Under an uneasy feeling that the spectacle was not seemly, Neil endeavoured to soothe and inveigle her into the house.

"Nefer you mind, Lisspeth," he murmured. "It will pe all right. You just wait, Lisspeth."

But Lisspeth had no notion of allowing herself to be softened or turned aside.

"Oh, yes," she retorted, turning the shafts of her wrath upon her husband. "It iss fine to hear you speaking. My pairn and yours too, Neil Macgregor, and more shame to



you, will pe nearly murtered afore my eyes and nefer a word apout it. It iss fine and easy saying 'Never mind, Lisspeth,' but I will mind, Lisspeth, and I will make you mind too, Lisspeth, and what is more, I will make him mind too, Lisspeth."

She turned and shook her fist again at the crouching Evan. "My lad," she hissed, "I will make you mind this the longest day you will live."

Jessie, waiting humbly to restore the fallen garments, was about to make the venture when Florence, who had the awkward knack of turning up when she was least wanted, made her appearance. Seeing Mrs. Macgregor in such disarray and with so red a face, she ran forward inquiring of that boiling lady if she was stripping in the open because of the great heat. Mrs. Macgregor could have eaten the child, knocked her down and stamped upon her for an impertinent brat, but remembering what was due to a rich man's daughter, she smothered her ire in a smile. It was a lowering, dubious kind of smile, but Florence had not perused her countenance. While the child spoke Jessie came dexterously behind and gave her aunt's dress a quick jerk to rights.

"You will pe a clefer lassie, Miss Florence," observed Mrs. Macgregor, wiping her streaming face and beaming with more success. "It will inteet pe extraornar hot this fery day."

Being ignorant of the Highland methods of dealing with the Queen's English, Florence saw no reason for using the future tense, and so she said emphatically, "It is hot."

"To pe shure it iss," assented Mrs. Macgregor unctuously, while Jessie gave her dress another surreptitious twist and tug in the rear. Mrs. Macgregor patted the child's head with a trembling hand, praised her curls, and hoped she would leave one behind; then, with a genuflexional motion that was half bow and half curtsey, and a broad melting smile, she dismissed the young heiress and suffered herself to be led into the house, Neil uxoriously carrying the discarded clothes in a bundle under his arm.

Dugald was close upon her heels, whimpering like a hurt cur. She turned just inside the door, and the sight of his variegated and defeatured countenance brought on a fresh paroxysm. Catching him up so frantically that he cried out sharply in the ardour of the embrace, she proclaimed



as a truth beyond contradiction that nobody but herself cared a jot for him; that he might be killed and torn and rent asunder, and his father would not lift a finger; that, indeed, his father didn't deserve to be his father at all, and wasn't worthy of the blessings of a wife and children. But men were all callous, selfish, hardened brutes: it was a wonder why God ever made them, and a still greater wonder why women ever married them; and altogether she, Lisspeth Macgregor, was without doubt or exception the most miserable woman in all the wide world.

She was led, panting and sobbing, to an arm-chair. There, sobering a little, she went over her tribulations categorically, and it appeared her husband was, directly or indirectly, responsible for them all. There were moments when Neil was tempted to deny the soft impeachment. But he had not been married for eighteen long years without learning wisdom, and so he discreetly turned the key upon his sentiments.

Meanwhile David Kinloch and Jessie went home to a meagre dinner and such meditations as recent events suggested. In the course of the afternoon they visited the beech-tree field with an offering of scone and jam, which Evan ate with a gusto in no wise diminished by recollections of what had happened. Nor was he at all backward in relating the entertaining occurrences of the day, and he certainly did not gloss or extenuate his own part in them. David listened to the sparkling tale without comment, but his looks were full of foreboding.

"There will be more of this," he remarked with a heavy sigh when Jessie and he took their way homeward. "Ay, there will be more of this; his aunt will not let it pass." And he was constrained to give expression to a thought that often rose in his mind. "It is a pity Evan can't be like others and behave himself." But he spoke rather in sorrow than in anger.



CHAPTER VII

DAVID was not mistaken. That night Mrs. Macgregor was pleased to banish sleep from her pillow in order to ruminate and devise, and early next morning the fiat went forth. Evan was to be punished with an exemplary punishment which, it was hoped, would benefit him for the rest of his life. To insure efficacy and prove her perfect fairness, even in her anger, the offended goddess decreed that the instrument of justice should be the culprit's father.

Accordingly, David was summoned to the august presence, informed in curt and precise terms of the decision, told how essential it is that boys should be trained in the ways of well-doing; then a switch that had been drying upon the rafters for six months was taken down and put into his hands, with the request that he should proceed at once to execute judgment. The tough, lithe rod was like supple steel, and as David bent it, feeling its cruel knots and seasoned fibre, he grew deadly pale.

"Is Dugal much hurt?" he asked huskily.

Yes, Dugald was very much hurt; indeed, the wonder was he had escaped with his life. It was added as a judicial axiom that the extent of the injury was no ground on which to estimate the wickedness of the crime; lastly, and most important of all, it was mentioned that Mrs. Macgregor's best silk gown, which had cost five-and-thirty good shillings only ten years before, was ruined, and that when she sought to correct him Evan had insolently defied her by taking refuge under the very nose of the bull—and, in fine, that the time had come to make an example of him.

David breathed hard and fast as he listened, and for a little the room and the wrathful goddess swam in a reeling mist. His heart was bursting with the wail that rings for ever of a father's grief. "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom." But the words that came from his lips were, "Can't you whip him yourself? Do it yourself."

"It will pe petter for you to do it," returned Mrs. Macgregor, with an ugly compression of the mouth. "Boys should be learned by their fathers and mothers, not by their uncles and aunts."



David's breathing became stertorous, and his face took on an ashen hue; there was a painful tightness in his chest too, and a cold moisture bathed the roots of his hair.

"Why was he not whipped yesterday, when the thing happened?" he demanded hoarsely.

"That will pe a fine question for a Gott-fearing man to ask," replied Mrs. Macgregor severely; "I'm thinking he will do enough without making us preak the Sawpath for him."

David's breast rose and fell as if he were in the throes of suffocation. It was not the convulsive flutter of fear, however, but the gathering of the spirit into a kind of dizzying rebellion. For that spark of the original Adam which slumbers through half a century of fanning gales, and bursts into flame at the blowing of a baby's breath, leaped, like a stream of fire, into his blood and brain. A headlong audacity, a heady passion of revolt, sang in his ears, and drove him tilting in the teeth of reason, like a man courting sudden death. His sister-in-law noted the rising tempest with amazement, that swiftly changed to terror. She had counted upon the crawling worm, and lo! the raging lion.

"He is going to refuse," she said to herself, and a tumult of confusion seized her. But she had no need to fear disobedience.

"Where is Evan?" asked David, in a voice so like a sudden thunderclap that she started.

"In the byre," answered Neil, taking part, for the first time, in the proceedings.

"Bring him here," said David.

"No, no," cried Mrs. Macgregor, "it will pe petter to go where he iss."

"Bring him here," repeated David, with that suppressed quivering force which is to the voice what the whiteness of anger is to the face. "Bring him here."

Neil went out instantly, a good deal puzzled, and more than a trifle alarmed. He had given Lisspeth her way, reckoning the proposed chastisement a trivial incident in the career of chastenings; but things were beginning to look ominously black, and Neil, who had rude notions of right and wrong when his heart was stirred, hoped that matters would not go too far.

Meanwhile David stood wringing the switch with tense fingers.



"You will see that the thing is done right," he said, fixing Mrs. Macgregor with a blazing eye, so that she trembled through every ounce of her ponderous fifteen stones. "And if this stick can kill him you will be glad."

A paralysing fear took hold upon her, and she quaked again through all her porcine proportions, like a trampled bog. She would fain have protested, reasoned, made excuses, pleaded, softened this insensate fury that threatened to put blood upon her head—nay, as an extreme concession, thrown justice and judgment to the winds.

Before she could unloose her tongue Neil and Evan appeared at the door. Quick as arm could reach, David seized his boy, turned him over, scarcely conscious of resistance, and the scourge fell on hips and bare legs, blistering them faster than ever slaver's lash scored a back. Neil felt a burning sensation in his vitals, a sensation of shame and pity and anger, and he put forth his hand to stay the raining blows. But David thrust it aside as if it were an impertinent child's.

"Keep out of my way," he roared. "Let her see the thing done right. God be my witness that he gets it to the end."

And to the end he got it. When his legs were almost raw, and the tough birch was a mere wisp of loose and broken fibres, Evan was released, and David drew himself erect, the remnants of the rod trembling in his right hand like a half-demolished cat-o'-nine-tails.

Nature holds nothing so awful as the rage of a meek man. The lightnings of scorn, the look of concentrated loathing which David turned on Mrs. Macgregor seemed to scorch and dry up the centres of her being. Pride and authority were as stubble in a devouring fire. She had an instinct to fly and hide, for it appeared he meant to bestow upon her the same ignominious stripes he had bestowed upon Evan. It was her turn to see things swimming vaguely in a mist.

She recovered with a gasp as David took a step nearer her. Moving sharply backward, she held her breath ready for defence with tongue and claw. But David's purpose was not bodily assault.

"There," he cried, flinging the remains of the switch at her feet. "There is your dried stick. Are you pleased, you —you Jezebel?"

He made a movement as if to go, but turned back abruptly, rage and despair contending in his face.

"Oh! he must be under the blackest curse of Heaven who is the bondman of his relatives. A beggar is a prince to him; the very dogs might pity him; and I have been a slave too long. But, thank God, you have given me courage to tell you I am done with it. You'll be sorry for your black work yet." He swung on his heel again.

"Come, Evan," he said, taking his boy by the hand, "come out of this." And the two passed out together, the white-faced maids, who had been peeping and listening, scurrying fearfully out of the way.

Inside there fell the blank, dead calm which follows a tornado. Neil and his wife looked at each other for the space of a minute, scared and speechless; then Neil quietly gathered the fragments of the birch and threw them on the fire.

Lisspeth was the first to recover. A sense of unpardonable insolence sent the blood tingling through her veins. What affront was this that the hireling David had put upon her? Had she not badgered the mutinous wretch with impunity any time these ten years, and did he dare to turn upon her now? Well, his fate be in keeping with his deserts. He needed one final and effectual lesson in humility, and he should have it. She would make a complete riddance of the pests: young and old, root and branch, out the Kinlochs should go to die in a ditch if they liked; it was all they were fit for.

"The time has come," she said vehemently, "the time has come to clear them out of this."

"Clear them out?" repeated Neil, as if trying to grasp her meaning.

"Clear them out? Yes, clear them out. Will you pe deef?"

"Lisspeth," said her husband, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes, "I think you will petter put a plaster on your mouth."

She paused a moment as if to fathom this new treason; then her batteries opened. But the fire that had so often crippled Neil into subjection now poured without effect.

"It will pe no use," he thundered, with an imperative gesture for peace. "Just keep your preath to cool your porridge. I do not know which of us iss the piggest fool or teffle, you to go so far or me to let you. I let you, thinking you had some sense and I wass wrong. Now I have

parently towards home; then, havi
at heart, Jamie ventured to ask
with the cows. He was startled
answer.

"Done with them?" said Neil. "
what pissiness will you have with th
to me about cows when I will wa
your horses, that's your pissiness,
gaping lout."

And turning with a snort he was o

"Fat's the maitter wi' the auld t
studying Neil's bobbing back and
thinkin' the mistress's been gettin' i
"and I canna say am sorry, though
mair soor milk on the head o't. As
stand there till their bones prog hol
pleases him. He's aifter Evan be t
fun's no owre yet."

Jamie had guessed aright: Neil wa
for ten years had he sped with such a
self with such relentless determinatio

He found his brother-in-law's cotta
grief and indignation. Jessie was batl
her face wet, her eyes flaming, while
in a fever of remorse and anger.

"There will be no more of it," he
as Neil entered. "We are done with t
for ever."

Neil glanced quickly from one t

I do not know how I allowed it. I do not know what I was thinking of."

Presently he rose and took Evan very gently and kindly by the hand.

"Come with me," he said.

But David stepped suddenly before them.

"No, Neil, never again," he said, and his voice vibrated like a too tense cord. "Let me keep my boy. He has been with you too long already. It would be better for him, ay, and for me too, if he had never seen you or yours."

"He'll come with me, David," repeated Neil softly.

"Neil Macgregor," said David with a rising inflection, "you have made me do this day what nothing but the grave will take out of my mind."

"It is past now," returned Neil meekly, "and it will not happen again."

"Neil," said David in tones that thrilled like the growl of a wild beast, "if I thought it lay in your heart to plan such a thing again, God forgive me, but I would choke you where you stand. Do not think that because I have done everybody's bidding and taken everybody's kicks all these years as if I were a bought slave, the feeling of things has gone out of me."

"Father dear, father," put in Jessie, laying a hand on his arm, "do not speak like that."

He calmed down as if there were magic in her touch, and indeed there was the magic of love.

"My poor lassie," he answered, patting her tremulously on the cheek. "Yes, yes, it is kicking against the pricks, I know that, Jessie, I know that."

"Perhaps you are making too much of it, David," said Neil, with the intentions of a peacemaker, and the words were not out of his mouth when he knew he had unleashed the lightning.

"Too much!" retorted David, turning on him like a flash. "Too much! and that is a fine thought for a father. If I was in your place and you were in mine I wonder if it would be too much. Neil, have you ever done what I did this day? Look at him," pointing to Evan. "How is he like that? Because I whipped him? No, but because your wife is a devil. And this is only one thing among too many to be counted. A thousand times I have thought I cannot be a man at all to endure so long. I put up with it for my

twice, thrice, each time with a more
holding her by the hand, he drew
seemed to stand before him the re-
mother. For a moment the strain
quivered and worked painfully, then
a choking sound, half gasp, half so
buried in a pair of gnarled hands.

Neil stepped to the window and lo
urgent necessity to discover the state
standing for perhaps the space of a mi
lip gripped in his teeth, he wheeled
speak, but the sight of David's head
two convulsive shoulders, sent him a
gaze with increased intentness out of

It was a morning to fascinate one
to the sentiment of nature. The last
dissolving in the conquering sunshin
above the house was a blaze of gold
blushed in the ruddy light, and not tw
sang its joyful matins. The red sky
rene blue-grey which promised an ide
But Neil thought little of crops and
Presently he turned with a jerk and a
sion of countenance.

"They are my sister's children," he
irrelevantly.

David looked up, his eyes still wet.

"They are, Neil," he said. "They ar
what she would think of all that has

God was upon us. Maybe we were proud, maybe we forgot Him. If that is true we deserve all that has come upon us, and more; only I hope we may be a warning to others. We will bear His stripes and praise His name; His displeasure will not be for ever."

Neil bowed his head. Then after a moment's silence he said, very softly, "For the sake of her that is gone, ay, and for your own sake too, David, I want Evan to come back with me."

"No, no! it cannot be," answered David quickly. "Let us talk as man to man, Neil. You are no longer my master; I am no longer your servant. As man to man, then, answer me this question. How could he go back? What kind of a father would he be that would let him go back? No, no. Our roads part here. It would have been better, I think, if they had parted long ago; but the parting has come at last. Let us each take his own way, and God give us strength to bear our burdens."

"Tut, tut! David," responded Neil. "I wonder at you, I wonder to hear you talking."

"If you were in my place you would likely wonder less," returned David. "It is easy wondering when the hot iron is not on ourselves—very easy. I'm only a man after all, and every feeling in me cries out against letting my boy go back."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Neil, descending to the practical.

"We will ask God's help," said David. "I think we are all forgetting Him. Yesterday we went to church and heard a sermon on love and charity and brotherly kindness, and we came home to do the bidding of the devil. The Pharisee would not do so much. Somebody will give me work. Maybe we can stop here till we get another place; we will be quick about it."

"Stop! cried Neil, so that the rafters rang. "Stop! yes, you can stop; and what is more you will stop. It is downright nonsense you are talking about going away. I will not listen to a word of it—not one word. And I tell you this," he added, with the look of one who is not to be thwarted: "I'll leave you Evan now, but as sure as we are living men I will have him again. I am master," he exclaimed, shaking his closed fist at things in general. "I will have my own way, and I will have Evan, mind you that."

And before a word could be answered he was gone.

Three minutes later he swept into the yard like a hurricane, to find Bob Conachar and Jamie Tosh idly discussing the situation. He paused for an instant at sight of them. Then came the greeting they expected.

"Ay," he cried, relapsing into English; "this will pe a ponnie way of working, clyping like a pair of toothless old wives. Iss it for gabbling or yammering I will pay ye, d'ye think? I will tell you this—use your hands a little more and give your tongues a rest; it will pay poth you and me petter."

Having delivered this volley he stamped into the house, where he chanced to come upon one of the maids scalding milk coggies.

"Give Tugal some porridge," he said so sharply and unexpectedly that the maid dropped a coggie half full of boiling water on the floor.

"Will you not haff fingers or hands or senses or anything?" roared Neil. "Ay, stare as if you wass seeing a ghost. I think all the folk will pe going daft. Where is Tugal?"

The maid faltered that so far as she knew he was not yet out of bed.

"No out of ped!" repeated Neil; "no out of ped at this time of day! This will pe praw work." And he was up an adjoining stair three steps at a time. He found Dugald yawning over the serious question of rising.

"You will split your face, Tugal, if you open your mouth like that," he said by way of morning salutation, "and you will have ped sores if you stick so close to plankets. Out with you!" And in an instant Dugald was on the floor wondering how he got there. He would have whimpered, but at the first sign of tears his father admonished him.

"One word of greetin'," said Neil, "and I will give you something to greet for. You pe at your porridge in one half of a minute if you will want any this day. Have you his porridge ready?" he shouted, descending the stair as if determined to dash his heel through each step.

"Yes," answered the maid with a terrified look.

"Well, then, py George, see that he gets it faster than you ever gave it to anypody pefore."

The last part of the sentence was flung over his shoulder as he hurried past the quaking maid in the passage to the byre. Arrived there, he shouldered his way into the stalls,

knocking the cows against each other in his haste, and began the process of unloosing. When he came to the bull he paused.

"You just stop where you are, my gentleman," he said. "There will only pe one pody about the place that's up to your tricks, and he iss off for a holiday." He gave the bull one in the ribs with his shut fist and hurried after the cows, calling aloud for Dugald.

"Here," cried his father when that promising youth appeared without having tasted breakfast, "take out the cows and see they will not get into the neeps or the tatties or the corn. If they do, py George, there is another switch on the rafters."

Dugald would have argued the matter, but there was something in his father's eye that intimated it might be prudent to forbear. So, with sullen looks and with what haste was possible to reluctant feet, he took his way to the beech-tree field. The cattle disposed of, Neil returned to the house in search of breakfast. Lisspeth was waiting for him in an attitude and with looks that are not popularly thought to be wifely.

"You have sent Dugald with the cows," she said in Gaelic, and there was a rumble of a tempest in the words.

"I have," said Neil.

"And the bull will maybe gore him to death."

"Maybe," assented Neil.

"It is a bonnie thing," retorted his wife, with the breath hissing through her nostrils like steam through a valve.

"Yes, a very bonnie thing," admitted Neil, clattering a chair in to the table and seizing a spoon.

"And if they bring that boy back dead, what will you do with him?" demanded Lisspeth.

"What do folks do with dead boys?" queried Neil. "Salt them or stuff them, I suppose."

"Neil Macgregor," cried his wife, unable any longer to repress the storm, "do you know what I am going to tell you?"

"Something as sweet as honey I am sure," observed Neil, swallowing a spoonful of porridge and milk.

"Sweet as honey," she screamed, "yes, maybe. It is this, that you ought to be downright ashamed of yourself."

"You have given me that bit of news before," remarked Neil.



"Ay, and I will give it to you again, and I will tell you it so loud too that you'll hear it on the deafest side of your head."

"I wouldn't if I was you, Lisspeth," said Neil with a meaning look. "Maybe it is better to take your porridge and hold your tongue."

"Take my porridge and hold my tongue! That's my thanks," she cried in a piercing crescendo. "I wonder what I was born for. You send your boy out to be killed by a bull, and you go clapping the backs of David Kinloch and his brats, that should be turned to the road like tinklers, and I cannot say a word."

"Take care, Lisspeth," said Neil, looking from under his brows, "take care."

"Oh," returned Lisspeth, throwing discretion to the winds, "take care yourself: you have more need of it than I have; and I tell you again, they ought to go into a ditch."

"Lisspeth," said Neil, starting to his feet, "another word, just as much as one word, and I know who will go into the ditch."

She paused, holding her breath, and looking as if she meant to spring at her recalcitrant husband.

"I suppose you have prigged them to stay," she said presently in an altered tone.

"I suppose I have done just what I like," answered Neil, "and I suppose I will do it again; and I suppose, too, this house is mine and that I am master in it; and more than that, I suppose those who don't like it are free to bundle and go; and to end up, you are at liberty to put that in your pipe and smoke it."

He threw down his spoon, smashing a jug that stood on the table, and bounced from the room, breathing destruction. Mrs. Macgregor stood for a moment as if considering whether to vent her emotions; but as there was no one by she thought it best not to go into hysterics.

CHAPTER VIII

Out of doors so many things clamoured for Neil's immediate attention that domestic concerns had to be thrust to the back of his mind. For this was a day on which Neil combined business with pleasure as at no other period of the four seasons. The hay was to be mown, fourteen excellent waving acres of it, and endless preliminaries had to be arranged—blades to be ground, burnished, and fixed at proper angles on sneds, strakes and sharpening stones to be dug from among a twelvemonth's dust and cobwebs, stupid men and stupider women to be directed and kept busy, and, most important of all, food and drink provided for a multitude endowed (as experience taught) with insatiable appetites.

Already, in accordance with the genial custom of the country, neighbours were arriving in a kind of trickling procession to lend a hand. Bluff, loud-voiced greetings mingled merrily with the swish of steel on grindstone, and Neil was prompt with the black bottle; for no day could be expected to proceed or end well that did not begin with the immemorial dram. It was noted by everybody that Neil had never been seen in better humour, and though Jamie Tosh had a mysterious look no one suspected the cause.

By half-past seven the prologue was over—the first bottle emptied, the blades ground and fitted—and twenty men, each with a scythe on his shoulder, marched blithely into the hayfield, the simple odour of which would have been bread and wine to the æsthete. Men of muscle, however, do not take nourismment through the nose, and Neil knew what was expected of him. A whole cheese, the best kebbock in Lisspeth's dairy, and a pile of oat-cake neatly packed in a snowy pillow-slip, appealed to the grosser appetite, while for stimulant between times there was the ample and essential jar of malt. The usquebaugh was a judicious blend of stuff from a near distillery and the crystalline product of stills worked without tribute to the Exchequer; and on the word of experts it had just the proper tang of peat. There was water, too, should any weakling so far forget himself as to mix his drinks or yield to teetotal fads,

but the contingency being unanimously ruled impossible, the jar was placed in the pitcher to prevent evaporation of the more precious fluid.

Surprise was expressed at the absence of David Kinloch, who had never before been known to fail at such gatherings, and Neil had to parry many questions.

Long Donald Bean, one of Red Sandy's cotters, a cadaverous, saturnine slouch of a man, with more children than he knew what to do with, suddenly remembered having seen Neil's own boy Dugald herding the cattle that morning.

"If I will only know," he said with a meaning glance at Neil, "I would send my Jock aifter them. Is there anything wrong with David or the lad Evan when they are both out of sight?"

"Not a thing," answered Neil lightly. "Not a thing that I will hear of, though I would not wonder a bit if they have got a fortune or something." And he adroitly changed the subject.

Once more the contents of the jar were sampled by way of promoting friendly relations, and pronounced "the real Mackay" with greater emphasis than ever: that done, the men stripped, slipping the braces from their shoulders, tightening their waist-belts, and in some instances throwing open their shirts at the throat. A moment later the encircling woods echoed the music of whetting, a ravishing melody that kindles the farmer's spirit to prophetic visions of crowded stackyards and overflowing granaries. Then, with a knowing touch of the finger on the keen edge of the scythe, one by one the mowers stepped into place, and presently twenty flashing blades swung and swept together as though swayed by a single impulse, and the rich hay fell in heavy swathes of green and gold.

The sun did not shine that morning upon a merrier company; for Neil was master of the art, the invaluable art, of keeping workers in lively spirits. A sagacious manager, he laughed at the most depressing jest, slapped his leg over pointless witticisms, was sly with the younger men about the lasses, and, above all, took care to keep the bottle well plenished. So frequently did the glass go round it was a wonder double vision did not lead to the mowing of legs as well as hay. But Neil understood that sons of the soil, uncontaminated by the finer virtues of civilisation, have steady heads on a hot day in the hayfield. At any rate, for

all the demand upon the jar, the hay fell as regularly, rhythmically, decently bout by bout as if well-water were the strongest drink known in those parts.

Time wore lightly on. The sun shone cheerily from a sky of liquid blue, in which floated filmy white clouds like streamers of carded wool; and the gentlest breath of a breeze upbore and wafted the odours afar, so that travellers paused on the highway sniffing to fill their lungs with the delicious aroma. Sunshine, spice and bloom, the music of the brook and the bee blending with the song of the scythe and the soft whispering of leaves gave a foretaste, a haunting conception, of an ideal world such as men love to inhabit in imagination. Even Red Sandy was touched into amiability.

"It iss not right to haff grudges," he said to himself, looking out upon the brightness of the world; and hobbled off to wish his neighbour joy.

Neil received him with the open arms of a Christian, and lost no time in presenting the overflowing cup of fellowship.

"Tell me what you think of it. I will not know anypody whose opinion is worth so much," said Neil.

"Oh, you will pe a grand judge of whusky yoursel', Neil," answered Sandy modestly, tumbling off his glass. "It iss goot stuff, Neil," he added enthusiastically, "capital stuff. Man, it iss a great peety the drappie will take the head, for it's real comfortin' to the stomach. Ye mind the Apostle's words, 'for the stomach's sake.' Thae old folks kenned a thing or two. 'For the stomach's sake,' says Paul, and, mind ye, he was an inspired man; the words were neffer said for the sake of the drink. I think the man that will follow Paul iss all right."

On the strength of the Apostle's recommendation Sandy was prevailed upon to take a second toothful, which he sipped very deliberately, with the sage expression of one giving a purely professional judgment.

"It will do, Neil," he said emphatically when the glass was empty; "oh, ay, faith, it will do prawly and grand too. You must tell me sometime where you got it, for I want to draw from the same spigot."

Then regretting that a man on stumps could not wield a scythe with any satisfaction, he made himself comfortable beside the jar to be ready to evince his friendliness when the men their "hydra drouth did slocken."

While Sandy was obliging his reconciled and pressingly

alert for the chance of adventure ar
she instantly proposed a walk to th
posal came pat with the invitation o
day and the roaming bent of her fat
humoured without demur. The thre
despite their city training were as p
scene as the Arab-like gipsies who
tattered canvas, bandied jests, and ir

Florence seemed more a creature
she skipped and hopped and ran, n
now pausing a breathless second t
bounding in sheer exuberance of life
and burned as the heart of a rose.

Mrs. Dudley noted the flooding
"That is how to lay up a store of he
said, her own colour deepening. "I
tonic like the Highland sun and
Leonard?"

She took her husband's arm with ar
sympathetic vibrations through his fr

"Upon my word, Alice," he repliec
intoxicated you."

"And you, too," she rejoined w
"Don't deny it, please, for I can feel t
it through your coat."

"It *is* pleasant," he admitted with
tical man who dreads exuberance of f

"Pleasant?" cried his wife with an e
arm, "why, it is so much more I fe

only the other day you were in transports over the 'Lotus Eaters.' Are these things quoted on 'Change?"

"We have all our moments of weakness," said the man of the world.

"Then it was in one of your moments of weakness you raved about the colours of Turner?"

He smiled ambiguously.

"And I suppose it must have been in one of his moments of weakness that Ruskin described them in sentences which take the breath away?"

"Don't miscall Ruskin, my dear. He is a great humourist. His commercial and economical theories are the most amusing things given to the world since the days of Adam Smith, though thick-headed people insist he means all he says. But in regard to Turner, he is serious and he is right."

"Well, Turner toddles a long way after all this," said Mrs. Dudley, waving her arm comprehensively at earth and sky. "Nature still seems to have the best of it."

"I take it that it isn't the business of the artist to improve on his model. Turner is as near nature as we are ever likely to get on canvas."

"It makes one almost weep to think of it," said Mrs. Dudley, smiling as if she had never known tears. "What a pity it is that the best painter is at his best but a muddling copyist, giving a splotch of red or grey for the sky, a streak of chrome-yellow for sunlight, something dark for a wood, and the smell of oil and varnish for fragrance. Think of all that and of the glorious reality as it is about us at this moment."

"Capital," cried her husband: "go on."

"Thank you for the permission. Well! there's something else that occurs to me. Consider this freshness, this repose, this sweet air (I would say 'balmy' if the novelists hadn't robbed the word of all virtue), this grass that shames the emerald on my finger, these woods that are so many waving censers, the broom, the gorse, the heather, the wild flowers, the everything as it is at this minute, and contrast it with the murky city. We work with gas-lamps and choke with soot and smoke, while all the time that blessed sun is shining in the heavens."

"Now," observed her husband, "you grow as humorous as Ruskin. Railways, factories, warehouses, wharves, exchanges, are to be done away with, the whole commercial and social fabric is to be demolished, and, I presume, Eden

restored. We shall go home in a bullock-cart, riding in state like Carlyle's Merovingian kings. The idea is worthy of a more romantic age: I like it."

"Please do not tease, Leonard; in that mood you are the most aggravating man I know."

They were walking at the moment under a spreading lime all a-hum with bees and heavy with perfume; the place was private, the temptation as she looked archly up irresistible, and before she was aware of it he had kissed her fair upon her red lips.

"There now," she cried, instinctively looking round, "suppose some one has seen us."

"Then probably it will be a prosecution for indecent behaviour in public. But I interrupted you."

"Yes; and just when I was about to become practical. We have money enough, Leonard, haven't we? Let us buy a place in the country and give up the fret and worry of business. You have worked hard, dear, and you have succeeded; now take a little rest and enjoyment."

"Why, Alice, that little speech from you of all people in the world! Whence this sudden and profound philosophy?"

"Out here it all seems so trivial," she said.

"Yet I'll wager half the profit on my next deal that to-morrow night you would sniff the footlights with ecstacy, and joyously give yourself a headache over a new dress."

"It is as hard to make you sensible as to get a joke into a Scotsman's head," she returned piquantly.

"Rate me without being unfair to the Scotsman, please. Well! we must see if we cannot transmute you into a dairymaid. You would be ravishing, I know, with a sunbonnet, a pair of broggans (I believe the word is technically accurate), a milking-stool, and a frayed and faded print frock delicately scented with the odour of the byre. I suppose," he concluded, "that in the rigours of winter you would thaw your frozen fingers by sucking them in the orthodox milkmaid fashion." Whereupon the two laughed together as people well assured of being safe from frost and sleet and blast.

And thus laughing they turned a corner to come upon Evan leaning dejectedly over a fence. There were manifest signs of distress in his face. It bore traces of recent scrubbing and the cheeks shone with the ruddiness of ripe apples;

but the brow was contracted and the eyes and mouth were frowning.

Surprised to find him loitering in idleness, they stopped to question; for partly from Florence's tales of his exploits, partly from facts within their own knowledge, their interest had been excited. His escapades were piquant if they should not be promising; and Mr. Dudley, who cherished no reverence for paragons, observed in the boy a refreshing individuality.

Evan answered the questions briskly as was his wont; but his depression was plain, and in truth the presence of the great folks was the reverse of grateful.

"Something wrong," whispered Mr. Dudley in a soft aside to his wife. "Trouble even in Arcadia, you see." Then aloud to Evan, "We are looking for the hayfield, and since you are making holiday perhaps you could be our guide."

It was an honour that Evan would fain have declined, for just then the hayfield was only a little less disagreeably suggestive than the kitchen of Pitweem; but he could not refuse "gentry," and so with a murmured "Yes, sir," he turned smartly to lead the way.

"The day is not one for haste," observed Mr. Dudley affably. "Don't you think you could accommodate your pace to ours?"

Evan fell back with a blush and an apologetic look. To put him at his ease Mr. Dudley took his hand, carelessly stretching out and examining the stained fingers. Their shapeliness and flexibility were astonishing, and Mr. Dudley proceeded with an awakened curiosity to spread out the little brown fist on the soft white ground of his own palm.

"By Jove," he exclaimed suddenly, "here's a discovery. You know the superstition—perhaps it is something more —that the hand is an index of talent. The idea is that where the second and third fingers are of equal or nearly equal length there must be exceptional ability. Look at that—they are almost even. Napoleon, they say, had a hand precisely like that."

Dropping the hand abruptly he raised Evan's cap. "Let us pursue our investigations a little further," he said, brushing back the tousled hair. "Head completely confirms the hand," he remarked after a moment's pause. "This is interesting."

Evan turned his dark eyes on Mr. Dudley's face with a



questioning astonishment, then all at once they fell, for Mr. Dudley was eagerly perusing his bumps, greatly to the disturbance of his feelings.

"An amazing head," said the examiner *sotto voce;* "I tell you, a perfectly wonderful head. Your chin, boy," tilting up Evan's chin. Then he whistled low and long. "In all my experience," he said presently, "I never saw such a combination of qualities. My boy, if you don't make people jump there's nothing in phrenology. I'll wager," he added, turning to his wife, "he dreams the dreams of a Cæsar."

"He might one day be president of a Stock Exchange," smiled Mrs. Dudley.

"With half a chance he might be many surprising things," returned her husband.

"And yet," said Mrs. Dudley, picking some down from the arm on which she leaned, "I suppose he will whistle at the tail of a plough (is not that the phrase?) like the rest of them."

He was remote from her sphere—a creature, as it were, of another planet, who could never touch her life; and she mildly wondered at her husband's enthusiasm.

"Probably," answered Mr. Dudley. "Yet it seems odd that such a headpiece should have been bestowed upon a mere clod-breaker. One can hardly imagine Nature squandering her good things in that way. She is inclined to be niggardly in the matter of brains, you know."

"She is freakish sometimes," remarked Mrs. Dudley, laughing lightly.

"Upon my word you grow profounder every hour," said Mr. Dudley, laughing in return. "You will be tackling the ape and the Evolutionist next. Well! Nature does act freakishly! Perhaps it's all a question of sex—the feminine gender."

"Leonard," cried his wife reprovingly.

"Well, well, my dear, let's get back to your postulate. Nature is freakish, but it would be an unheard-of freak on her part to furnish the embryonic ploughboy with that top-piece. I do not know what I wouldn't give for a son with such a head."

"A son with any head, Leonard," observed his wife quietly.

"Well! we can only hope and pray, little chitty. One notices there is no scarcity of sons and heirs in the Highlands

—another freak of Nature, I suppose. But not to wander, it is a most unmotherly freak to bring this little chap to such an inheritance. What are his chances? From the ordinary point of view, *nil*. Yet strange things happen in this world. We are constantly hearing of miracles of achievement, of great men and their unaccountable courses. Now, just as surely as Jesus came out of Nazareth, great men spring from unlikely places. May we not yet hear of our little friend in another and quite different arena? May he not one day bear a part in turning the tides of the great world?"

And contrary to all the traditions of his class, in face of the inexorable law which decrees that the rich and powerful shall not lower themselves by regarding the poor, there stole into the heart of the rising financier a subtle romantic interest in a disgraced herd-boy.

"I will keep my eye on this youngster," he said to himself. "He's of the kind that make a spoon or spoil a horn."

CHAPTER IX

MEANWHILE the presence of the party had attracted the attention of the mowers. Dropping his scythe in a flutter of excitement, Neil trotted off to Sandy's side, calling out as he advanced, "Yon's the shentry. I must pe stepping east py to meet them, and you will just stop as you are, Sandy, and keep quiet and cool. Do not pe put apout; they will pe gey and nice poddies, hooch ay, and not one pit prouter than me or you. I will pring them up fine and smiling, and I will say, This iss my frent Mr. Fraser of Praeside."

"Neffer mind the 'Mr. Fraser,' Neil; it soonds affektit. Just say Praeside all py itself. Say folk call me Praeside; it will pe more wisser like, and I will say they call you Pitweem."

"Pitweem and Praeside," said Neil, turning the words sweetly on his tongue; "man, that's the touch. You will pe a gey and pright one too, Sandy; ay, faith, there will pe more in your head than people think. But gosh, I must pe off. The poor poddies will think they are not wanted. Am I snod-like, Sandy?"



"Snodder than me," answered Sandy, cocking an eye at such parts of his person as were within view.

"Fuich, you will pe just grand, Sandy," returned Neil, too polite to mention the overflow of snuff on the nose and chest; "you will pe grand, man."

He gave his shirt-collar a pull, brushed some hay-seed from his trousers, drew the back of his hand across his mouth by way presumably of priming it for the fine speeches that were to follow, and, once more enjoining Sandy to keep cool, went off as if to receive a company of reigning sovereigns.

While he was yet two hundred yards from his visitors he began the bowing and the hat raising; for he said to himself, it was wiser to waste a little energy than to seem lacking in courtesy and cordiality towards such distinguished people. The distinguished people took his advances graciously, and Neil was carried out of himself with delight.

Having exhausted all the forms of welcome he knew, commented upon the weather, and, as he thought, made an excellent impression, he proceeded without loss of time to redeem his pledge to Sandy. The thing was done in his gallantest and airiest manner. Bringing the Dudleys up "fine and smiling," according to the strict letter of his promise, he bowed majestically, and with a wave of the hand meant to set everybody at ease, he took leave "to resent my goot frent Praeside."

The visitors smilingly expressed their pleasure in the meeting, and hoped they found Praeside well. For a man of his mettle, Sandy's response was stammering. Something in their eyes and about the corners of their mouths disconcerted him—a look, a twitch of amusement, as if some wicked imp were tickling them behind. A deeper shade stole into his peony face, and for a moment even his wooden leg seemed to lose its self-possession. But the promptitude with which Neil drew upon the bottle relieved him, and his composure was perfected by an immediate difficulty about glasses.

There were four of these: one was chipped and jagged in the brim, two were broken off by the stalk, and all were polluted by a score of plebeian lips.

"They will not pe the thing for a leddy taking a dram, mem," said Neil apologetically, looking at Mrs. Dudley.



"Oh, but, good gracious! you don't expect me to drink whisky?" replied the lady in alarm.

"Ay, inteet, mem," rejoined Neil gravely. "It iss a goot thing whatever. Wine will not pe pad, whiles—I take it myself at Communions and things, but the dram iss the thing."

"But indeed, Mr. Macgregor, I never taste it," protested Mrs. Dudley.

"And what for no?" asked Neil. "It will be a gey and ponnie thing if you wass to come out here to see us and nefer be asked will you have a mouth on you."

Then a happy idea flashed upon him.

"Here," he said, thrusting the whole glass into Evan's hand, "here, take it to the purn quick and wash it clean, clean, and pring it pack faster than your legs can run. He will pe here in a minute, mem," he added, turning back to Mrs. Dudley.

"You're in for it," remarked Mr. Dudley, laughing; and when presently Evan returned with the dripping glass, Neil absolutely declined to entertain excuses; so she drank perforce to a good hay harvest.

"Oh, you must weet it, mem, you must weet it," cried Neil, noticing that she scarce touched the liquor with her lips. "It will do you goot, mem, this hot day."

She swallowed a mouthful, raw and burning, and drew back gasping.

"The pillow-slip," cried Neil. "Quick, quick, the pillow-slip."

He presented her with a piece of oat-cake, which she ate with streaming eyes; then she laughed.

"I knew you will like it, mem," observed Neil joyously. "It iss goot stuff. My frent Praeside says so, and he will be a gey and goot judge too."

Mr. Dudley tasted also; Braeside and Pitween each tossing off a glass at the same time to testify their cordial feeling. Then the men were called, and one by one they drank to Mr. and Mrs. Dudley, to Florence, to Braeside, to Pitweem, to each other, and to the hay.

"There will pe a pig parrel at home," explained Neil as he poured from the failing jar. "Do not pe afrait, my latts."

These delicious ceremonies over, the lads returned to their scythes, jocular and boisterous, Mrs. Dudley remarking their hearty good humour.

"Oh, ay, mem," said Neil, "they will be gey and like the pagpipes too, there will pe most noise in them when they're fou."

All this while Evan had stood unregarded, save in the glass incident, but Mr. Dudley now directed attention to him by observing that he had been good enough to conduct them to the hayfield.

"That will pe fery goot," said Neil, looking approvingly upon his nephew.

"And on the way," added Mr. Dudley, "we have been amusing ourselves by casting his horoscope."

"Inteet? inteet, sir," said Neil, marvelling what manner of thing a horoscope might be, and whether the casting of it required skill or merely muscle. Was the countryside to congratulate itself on the introduction of a new sport?

"There is remarkable promise," pursued Mr. Dudley. "His bumps are wonderful."

Neil's eyes dilated with intelligence.

"Oh, ay, sir, Evan will pe a gey, gey latt," he responded, connecting the bumps by logical sequence with the proceedings of the morning. "Many's the bump Evan will haff, many's the one."

"The number, I think, is normal," observed Mr. Dudley. "It is their character that surprises me. I assure you I have never read a better head."

Neil cast a shrewd look from under his bushy eyebrows. Was this a liberty or was it only a jest? Reading a head—who ever heard of such arrant nonsense? Yet Mr. Dudley was as serious as if he were telling gospel truth. Was it possible that the drop of whisky had been too much for him? Ere Neil could satisfy himself on the point, discussions and speculations alike were interrupted by Florence. Under a sudden impulse of frolic, she began in great glee to pelt Evan with new-mown hay; he promptly retaliated, and the whole field stopped to watch.

"There's game there," remarked one man, leaning admiringly on his scythe. "No fear o' that yin turnin' nun, am thinkin'!"

"Wait till she's twenty," put in a comrade, "and, my faith, she'll make hearts dunt. Just see how the wee cutty goes at it."

"Evan will pe in mighty praw company the day," said a third. "I will not wonder if it would suit him just as well

to pe herding his kye." The speaker was Long Donald, whose thoughts still ran on Jock and the vacant herdship.

"Sirs, that's a pretty sicht," chimed in another, ignoring Donald's comment. "Now, would it not be a wonderful thing if thir twa bairns was to mak' the thing up some day and be merrit?"

He was a low countryman and did not talk the dialect of the district.

"Man, ye will haff a grand way of thinking things," retorted Donald. "What ye say would pe wonderfu' and perfeckly extraornar too forby, only it iss neffer likely to happen. You will have just as much chance of merryin' a praw London leddy. What he will want iss his kilt turned up. Are we going to stand all the day looking at pairns playing?"

He swung his scythe with a wide sweep as if those who had legs would do well to look after them.

"It iss in a great pig hurry you are, Donald Bean," cried the man immediately in front. "Will you often pe taken like that?"

There was a chorus of satirical laughter, with commentaries apposite to the occasion; then with a backward wrench of the shoulders as if to brace the straining muscles the men struck again into time.

The Dudleys looked on with a quickened interest; for of all rural or agricultural sights, the most winning is the rhythmic swing of a serrated line of mowers.

Mrs. Dudley was moved to fresh ideas of poesy and new visions of the delights of country life; even Mr. Dudley, whom his wife openly charged with cynicism, was not proof against the charm, while Florence, running to and fro, sometimes in dangerous proximity to a flashing blade, shouted for joy at the novel spectacle.

Finishing their bout, the men presently trooped back to raise the clamour of sharpening. Musical and soothing from afar, the process is one which at close quarters is apt to set the teeth on edge and rasp unpleasantly in the ears. Discovering that distance sometimes lends enchantment to sound as well as to view, the visitors affably exchanged farewells with Neil and Sandy, and took their way to pluck more flowers and feast on the omnipresent fragrance.

"Will they not pe nice poddies, Sandy?" inquired Neil, watching them with deep self-satisfaction.

"Ay," responded Sandy, scratching his head in perplexity; "but am jalousin', Neil, am jalousin' apout that wort 'resent' of yours. Am thinking it iss consent, Neil, that will pe right. There wass a queer look on their faces."

"What iss the tifference, Sandy?" said Neil balmily. "Consent or resent—it iss all the same. You just leave that to me. Here, man, wet your whistle. One will think you wass teetotal."

And Sandy amiably complied. Half-an-hour later he went home, and Neil returned to his scythe for the day.

In the evening, when the hay was all down, and the mowers were parting after the last glass, Long Donald approached Neil confidentially.

"I will see prawly how it iss," he whispered. "You just say the wort and my Jock iss here to-morrow morning at five o'clock for the herding."

Neil had a sharp answer on his tongue, but he remembered the occasion was privileged and smiled urbanely.

"It will pe fery goot of you, Donal," he said, "and we will see. Good night, Donal, and thenk ye. It wass a praw fine day we got and the sky will look well for to-morrow. The hay iss lucky this year too." But when Donald was out of earshot, "The teffle plister your tirty tongue. Your Jock—ay, inteet, your Jock and my pig will pe a grand yokin'." And presently, having disposed the day's affairs, he went in to Lisspeth and conjugal joys.

CHAPTER X.

His reception was of a character to cool connubial ardours. To sentimental poets and gushing innocents rapturously drunk with the wine of imagination wedlock is a heaven-invented patent for transforming men and women into turtle-doves. Neil was neither a poet nor an innocent, but a married man of eighteen years' standing; consequently he was under no illusions. He was quite prepared for the bracing crispness of Lisspeth's manner—her high look and equivocal welcome. Day and night during all those years of marital bliss he had studied her patiently, diligently, in

every circumstance of the marriage state, taken her to pieces, so to speak, sifted her, and got her off by heart. Like the gentleman in the play, he loved so long and so closely that he found out a strange thing—he found out "what a woman is good for."

He had had some scales cleared from his eyes in the course of time, but he desired to be scrupulously just, particularly when things were going so well with the farm. Lisspeth was good enough, he told himself, as women go—an ideal mother, a peerless manager, the best butter-maker within the sphere of his acquaintance, and in sour milk cheese absolutely above competition. She was devoted to fowls and calves too, could put fat on a pig in a way that was magical, and make skim milk and pease-bread go farther among servants than any woman in the district. These were great qualities in a farmer's wife, but he would not dream of calling her an angel. There was a time, indeed, in the days of his infatuation, when he was convinced of her celestial origin. But experience had corrected the fanciful notion. The moon must have been always at the full when he entertained it. Now he knew she was supremely terrestrial, often anti-angelic, but was ready to own her virtues wore none the worse on that account. An angel feeding pigs and squabbling with ploughmen would, he was aware, be an incongruous spectacle, and, he was certain, not at all a paying one. He was the most reasonable of men, was the last in the world to expect or desire perfection either in himself or in other people; yet he could not perceive the fitness of effacing himself to suit feminine humours and absurdities. Even a husband has his rights.

On entering his spouse's presence it did not surprise him in the least to pass from an atmosphere of balmy peace to one of "saltpetre and earthquake." His foot was scarce across the threshold when the long-suppressed nether forces began to rumble and boom. Neil compressed his lips expectantly. He had calculated to a nicety when she would plunge back into the dispute of the morning, and he was not without plans. The little preliminary skirmish that was to give an impulse to the blood came precisely as he had anticipated; and then she was upon him with a swoop.

He was not overwhelmed: indeed, he was not so much as shaken. Like a rock in Atlantic surges, he reared himself defiantly after the onset, impregnable upon an immovable



base. Lisspeth recoiled in some confusion, and he took the opportunity of bringing down his clenched fist on the solid deal table with such decision that the dishes on it danced a jig. As his wife, cut short in the midst of a sentence, stared in mingled consternation and anger, he stated that for once in his life he was not amenable to argument—that taunts, tears, scoldings, upbraidings, reason, passion, eloquence were equally idle, since he was resolved to give Old Nick a lesson in obduracy.

"You may flyte, Lisspeth," he said in Gaelic, "till you pech your last gasp, and it will be clean waste of breath. I am as thrawn as the devil."

"Ay," she returned pungently, "you were always that."

"Well, I am ten times more thrawn now. If I was you I would go quietly to bed and say my prayers. They might do you good."

"I do not know which of us needs prayers most," retorted Lisspeth.

"Maybe they would do neither of us any harm," observed her husband, "and that minds me that when you are at it you can just put in a word for me." He raised his hand peremptorily as she showed a disposition to reply. "And, Lisspeth, there is no use talking—no use whatever."

So, delivering a parting broadside, Lisspeth retreated to her own chamber, with a headache and a fixed conviction that husband is merely a synonym for Son of Beelzebub. Neil listened till he heard her door shut with a bang.

"Lisspeth has it bad," he remarked to himself, "Lisspeth has it very bad indeed. But maybe she will come round; it's likely she'll be able to cool in the skin she got hot in."

Then, having bundled the maids off to bed, he sat down in his shirt-sleeves and "stocking feet" to toast his toes at the greasach and smoke the pipe of peace.

He was very little ruffled by the scene that had just closed; for he had asserted himself less in anger than in a reasonable determination to be master in his own house. A consciousness of success gave him a mollifying sense of the fitness of things. But he did not gloat over his triumph. He harboured no unkind or resentful feelings towards anybody as he sucked placidly at his black clay. On the contrary, he was on terms of good fellowship with the whole world, and was ready to own that, everything considered, his lines were cast in exceedingly pleasant places.

The day had been one to make the farmer's heart brim with satisfaction. The hay was down, and the crop exceeded expectations. What was more, the sunshine promised to be steady. A week of such bright heat, and the hay should be safely stacked. All material concerns tended to complacency. He thought forgivingly of Lisspeth: she was given to spurts of violence, and was not above prejudice, but she had her good points, he said to himself, thinking of fat swine, glossy calves, and high-priced butter. He would be up to her presently, with soft words, husbandly endearments, and no hint of a quarrel. Yes, on the whole, Lisspeth was a good wife. If she could be induced to clip her tongue and curb her temper, she might be improved, but one must not expect too much.

Neil's thoughts, still in amiable train, passed to Red Sandy. What a fellow Sandy was, to be sure! Neil chuckled softly at the thought of certain escapades that hung romantically in the memory. "A gey lad, Sandy," he said, as it were in the deepest confidence with himself, "a droll, droll fellow. The things we have seen together!" And, as though re-tasting the old, sweet, forbidden experiences, he shook his head and chuckled again.

In due course his thoughts travelled to the Dudleys. Excellent people! They were paying him a pretty penny for a three-months' lease of three-quarters of the house, and were gracious. He hoped they would return next year, and the year after and for many years to follow. More profitable tenants he could not desire. They took dairy produce at Lisspeth's valuation, and mutton at his own. They were very nice people indeed.

By logical sequence, he thought of David and Evan, and at that he took his pipe from his mouth and expectorated vigorously. *There* was a matter to be set right without delay.

"My sister's children," said Neil, thinking aloud, "Jessie's children. The thing should never have happened; never."

He had no light but the dusky-red glow of the smouldering peat fire, which was reflected luridly on wall and ceiling, nor, except the measured tick, tick of the big eight-day clock, was there a sound, not so much as a wandering whisper of wind, to disturb his meditations. The silence was the dead hush of a sweltering July night, when nothing save the summer lightning that played fitfully about the edges of the clouds, had energy enough to be abroad.



Taking up the tongs, Neil stirred the fire, as it were for company, and the capering shadows—grotesque, eerie, illusive, haunting—seemed to fill the room with uncanny presences. Feeling that he had sat long enough alone, he began to gather the ashes into the heap that was to keep the red centre alive until morning, for the fire was never allowed to die. All at once he looked up, and the breath went out of him at the sight of a face at the window—a ghastly white face, that jigged horribly in the flickering light. A chilly, creepy sensation came over him, a ridiculous sensation, which a man of his years and spirit could not thole. Laying his pipe on a chair very deliberately, to make sure he was master of himself, he rose, stalked to the window, and, putting a hand to each side of his face, peered into the night. The familiar scene slept peacefully, and without sign of intruder. He drew back, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Man, woman, or child, ghost or bogle, he would find out who dared to spy on his privacy. A third time he looked, staring hard, but there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to be seen, save what was usual and natural.

"If the whisky was bad I would think I was seeing things," thought Neil, with an unsuccessful effort to smile to himself in the dark.

The clock struck sharply, and he started as if a cannon had banged at his ear. Returning to the fireside, he stuck his pipe in his mouth, and gave half-a-dozen tremendous pulls without being in the least aware that the tobacco was not alight. Then he paused to hearken, inwardly cursing the blatancy of the clock.

"Fuich," he muttered. "Fuich, this will never do. One would think I was afraid."

Scooping some glowing ashes into the bowl of his pipe, he pulled again, but without effect.

"The dottle is wet," thought Neil, clapping the brim of the bowl smartly on his palm. "Ay, and very likely the tobacco is bad. I wonder what the world is coming to; a body cannot even get a good smoke."

He threw the discredited dottle in the fire, and was proceeding to refill his pipe, when he chanced to glance again at the window.

"Gosh, it is funny," he remarked, again laying down his pipe, "I will take another look."

He rose, but at the second step he stood fixed to the

floor, his marrow suddenly frozen, and a cold sweat oozing on his brow. For there, unmistakable as was ever ghost from kirkyard, was the white, drawn face, gazing at him with eyes that were fearful to behold.

"As sure as death," he ejaculated, "my sister's face—Jessie's face."

David's words flashed across his mind. Had his sister come back from the dead to upbraid him? God help him, how should he receive her? What answer could he make to her? He shook as if taken with the palsy; his head reeled, and he seemed to be choking. Recovering a little, he went forward with knees that smote each other, and cast yet another look into the outer darkness.

The thing had vanished. The young moon, the hills, the woods, the buildings were there; but never a sign of a ghost. With a kind of gulp, he thrust his face against the glass; but he thrust it in vain: no fearful eyes were fixed upon him, no spectral figure flitted illusively among the shadows.

He turned back with a gruesome shiver at his heart and every hair on his head erect. As he listened, involuntarily holding his breath, he heard a tap at the outer door, a low weird tap that curdled him through and through. Under its awful fascination Neil mechanically put on his boots and moved towards the door. He seemed to be drawn by an invisible hand; the feeling that was upon him was unearthly and he knew well what it meant.

He had to grope his way through a passage between two partitions, and in its blackness of darkness he drew up with a spine that was as a trickling icicle. Only a few boards separated him from the wraith. Suppose that, growing impatient, it availed itself of ghostly powers and popped through the keyhole; suppose—but there was no use supposing: there it was waiting for him, and go to it he must. Before he knew what he was about he had taken a kind of leap and was shooting back the creaking bolt; a moment more and the door was wide open. Heaven forefend! he was face to face with the spirit.

"Who will pe there?" he gasped, staring into the black shadows with eyes that saw not.

"It's me, uncle," came tremulously out of the night.

"And who will pe me, uncle?" and then before there could be a reply he burst out in his mother tongue. "God bless



us all, Jessie! what are you doing here at this time of night frightening people out of their wits? Come in," he added seizing and dragging her through the door. "Lassie, you have made my heart jump. What is it, Jessie? Is there anything wrong?"

"It's about my father," said Jessie.

"Your father?" returned Neil hastily, "your father is all right, I'm thinking. Wait till we get a light."

After much rummaging and the fall of half the utensils in the kitchen he got a candle, which he lit with a burning fragment of peat.

"I declare, lassie," he said, examining his niece, "you're just like a sheet; no wonder I took you for a ghost. Now, what in the world is making you look like that?"

"Oh, my dear uncle," answered Jessie, and the tears sprang to her eyes, "you will not be angry with me for coming, but this will kill my father."

"No, it will not," returned Neil so emphatically that Jessie shrank back in fear. "No, it will not. I'm angry with you for that white face, Jessie. Sit down."

She took a chair, sitting uneasily on the edge as one having no right of occupation.

"I hope you will forgive me, uncle, but indeed I could not help coming to you. Must we leave?"

The question brought with it a gush of tears which Jessie strove in vain to keep back.

"No more of that, Jessie," replied her uncle quickly, "not another word. Listen, I'll tell you a secret," he went on, leaning confidentially towards her. "I am master here now; it's all settled."

He winked in spite of himself, and grinned, displaying a set of brown teeth. "But not a word against your aunt," he cautioned, "I'll not have that either." All at once his face glowed with an inspiration. "Since you are supplest put on more peats and blow the fire," he said.

"I am keeping you out of bed when you are tired," responded Jessie.

"If lassies would just do what they are told," said Neil, "you have no notion how much nicer they would be. You're a quick lassie, Jessie; let me see how fast you can make a blaze. I'll put water in the kettle."

Taking up the candle and the kettle he made his way to the scullery, where, after some searching, he found a pitcher

of water. He helped himself, drowning half the cockroaches on the floor in the process, and hastened back smiling to sling the kettle on a chain that depended over the fire from a cross bar.

"You know the presses better than I do," he remarked. "Get out the jeel and the scone and the butter and a kebbuck. I'll see if there's not a crock of cream to the fore."

"But, uncle——"

"If I thought you came here to argue, as sure's I'm living I would have slammed the door in your face. There's one thing I have never been able to understand—why God gives womenfolk such a gift of the gab. Come, I will hold the light."

He turned, and she followed meekly in a maze of wonder and trepidation. In a cupboard in the pantry they got scone, not dry hard pease-bread, but soft white toothsome flour scone, and jelly and butter and cheese, an armful apiece, which they deposited on the kitchen table. Then seizing a jug and a huge horn spoon Neil made for a crock of cream he had spied by the way. He was back in a trice, licking the spoon and his fingers alternately, and chuckling like an urchin after a successful raid on an orchard.

"What do you think of that, Jessie?" he inquired blithely, holding up the crystal jug so that she could see the frothy, fluffy stuff within. "Now for the teapot," he added, setting his prize on the table.

"You are not to do that, uncle," protested Jessie. "Indeed you must not make it for me."

"You are fine at jumping to conclusions," he laughed. "Who said it was for you? Get cups and saucers and sugar and things, make yourself useful—and you, my bonnie black friend," nodding to the kettle, "sing us your cosiest sang as fast as you like. I'll just give you a wee puff to your bottom to cheer you up."

The wee puff was a whistling tornado from the bellows, that sent the flame about the kettle like a sheet of gold. The next minute the song rose briskly, then died suddenly as the lid began to drum and the spout belched steam.

"I thought that would kittle you," cried Neil, throwing down the bellows and putting a handful of Lisspeth's precious tea in the pot. In less than two minutes the decoction was brewed—black and bitter, for Neil in his headlong



good-will had set the pot in the midst of red-hot cinders and it boiled. But extra portion of sugar and cream helped to mellow the too pungent flavour.

"I'm just that hungry I could eat a sheep," he remarked. "That hay-cutting gives a body his appetite."

As he spoke he took two squares of scone, buttered them, laid a fat slice of cheese on one, turned that over on the other, and clapping the pieces together handed them to Jessie.

"That will do for a start," he said blithely. "Ah, you must do better than that," he cried, noticing how perfunctorily she nibbled. "That kind of eating's small compliment to the cook. If you don't do better I'll never forgive you, never."

To show how the thing out to be done Neil himself set vigorously to work, making rapid havoc among every kind of edible on the table. He was in the thick of his operations, struggling breathless indeed with a mass of bread and cheese which he had somehow contrived to get into his mouth and could not very well chew, when all at once the door swung back and in there strode a figure more terrible than ghost or bogle. It was clad in a stumpy nightgown that showed a pair of overgrown feet and a big white cap with flouncing borders tied truculently under the chin. Neil almost choked at sight of it, and Jessie stared, quivering like a detected thief.

The figure surveyed the two with severe, prolonged deliberation, then, maintaining the same stern, rigid scrutiny, it passed to the table, counting the dainties one by one. At last it spoke.

"A bonnie sight," it observed in Gaelic, fastening its eyes upon the chief sinner.

Neil somehow bolted his mouthful of bread and cheese, leaped to his feet and set a chair.

"Sit down, Lisspeth," he cried, "Sit down. Gosh, I am glad you have come. Jessie, a cup for your aunt—quick. The tea's of my own making, Lisspeth: not often I make tea, but a thought came into my head. Sit down and tell me how it tastes."

"I have my health as well standing," answered Lisspeth freezingly, "and I would only be putting you about. It seems the master can enjoy himself better when the mistress is out of the way."



She turned her eyes upon Jessie, who had the sensations of crumpling in a flame.

"I came about my father," said the wretched girl, feeling she must speak, yet not knowing what to say.

"I want to hear nothing about your father, lassie; he has made trouble enough here already."

Jessie gazed at her aunt as she might gaze at a crouching tiger, and heavy drops began to fall from her lashes.

"I could greet too when I was your age," remarked Mrs. Macgregor, "but I never found that it did much good. I would get over the habit if I was you."

Something seemed to flash behind the moisture in Jessie's eyes; clenching her trembling lips tight and whisking away the tears as if they stung her, she rose quickly to go. But Neil, who had noticed the flash, promptly interposed.

"Sit down," he said cheerily. "Bless me! we are not nearly half done yet. Will you do what your old uncle tells you?" he demanded as she hesitated, "or do you want to let him see plump and plain his tea's not worth drinking?"

"Maybe my aunt would sooner be without me," returned Jessie, catching a trembling lip in her teeth.

"Fuich, fuich! I thought you had more rummle-gumption," rejoined Neil. "I thought you would take a word of fun. Your aunt must have her haver like other folk." But his private thought was "God help the man who has to make peace between two hostile women."

Outwardly, however, he was as one completely and perfectly in his element.

"Now, Lisspeth," he said sweetly when Jessie was again seated, "let us see how canty you can make yourself. I just thought you would like this surprise."

"Ay, very likely," said Lisspeth, shooting barbed darts from her eyes.

"As sure's you're alive," asseverated Neil. "And will you be good enough to tell me what other man's wife deserves a little spree as well as you? Red Sandy was saying just the other day—but there, Lisspeth, it would make you vain."

"Much I'm caring what Red Sandy says or thinks either," replied Lisspeth, with a snort and a toss of her voluminous nightcap. "If you saw less of him I'm thinking it would be better for you."

"Ah, well! if you knew, Lisspeth, if you knew," said Neil, with a meaning smile. "But never mind, the thing will

vvell," he remarked, as he wr
get her into a chair, "I cannot de
me a fine armful of a wife. And
quality. Now, Lisspeth—steady-
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plaidie to hap you."

He got a plaidie and he got sli
the purpose, by arts of more than
he got Lisspeth, unawares as it app

"Ha, ha!" he cried with so sharp
both women started, "I knew you
old wife for tea. And is it not good

Lisspeth made a wry face.

"As good as senna," she replied
again.

"We'll soon sort that," said Neil, p
jug into his wife's cup till she prote
"All it wants is cream—cream and a
enough of the latter to make a syr
added, "see if that does not tickle th
head."

And having thus, as it were, got th
to tell his drollest stories, talked friv
jects, made execrable jokes about no
with irrelevant fits of merriment (e
served his wife about to speak), and
genious devices showed he had co
matter that was uppermost in th

beauty sleep. Will you be afraid going alone, or will your uncle toddle with you?"

Jessie thanked him and replied she was not in the least afraid.

"I know, I know," said Neil, bobbing his head with a look of profound astuteness. "Well, we must not spoil trysts; we were young ourselves once. And that minds me that your aunt has had a hard day: hay-cutting is worse on women bodies than on the men. To-morrow's churning-day, I think. Let me see how early you can be here to make the butter and give her a rest."

Mrs. Macgregor begged it might be clearly understood she never was fitter for work in her life, that she was not in the least need of help, and that Jessie could sleep all next day if she pleased; but so full of husbandly consideration was Neil that he absolutely declined to listen.

"You have earned a rest, Lisspeth, and a good one too," he answered; "and just as sure's you're living you are going to have it."

He moved towards the door with Jessie, saying aloud it was a fine night and promised good weather, though there was a little wild fire in the sky. It was secretly and stealthily that he whispered, "What you came about is all right, Jessie. Tell your father to talk no nonsense about leaving. I won't have it." Then once more aloud:

"Don't forget the morning, Jessie. Good-night. Mind the bogles that kiss in the dark."

With that he bolted the door and returned to get Lisspeth back to bed lest she should catch cold. Before going to sleep she referred adroitly to Red Sandy's compliments, and Neil, chuckling inwardly, knew that the battle was won.

CHAPTER XI

By arts of which his dearest friends would not have suspected him, Neil pursued the mollifying process with David. The farm work seemed his pastime; the siege his proper business. Early and late, "at morn, at noon, at twilight dim," and at every possible moment between whiles he was playing his strategic game, lying in wait with the craft of a

looks. He took it all with such he
Jamie Tosh, acrid with disgust, d
sklate off the roof," a caustic loc
hopeless infirmity of the head.

They little understood the machir
the end of a week Neil, wreathed ir
springs, led David and Evan captiv
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tions with abusive brush and curry-c
bottle was produced to celebrate rest
Tosh, grinning till his mouth was
crimson moon-face in two, owned he
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of fact, the roof had never been in a
dition.

Neil managed the affair with c
adroitness. In the treaty of capitulati
that Evan was no longer to be subject
tion, this being balanced by an under
abate his passion for practical joking
refrain from meddling with Dugald,
half suspected he cherished the desi
black eyes upon that model boy on th
opportunity.

As an encouragement in the paths
lowed the choice of resuming his

The original intention had been to give him a sharp dose of manual labour, and when he should be cured of his friskiness to pack him back grateful and glad to the herding. But he stretched his neck so eagerly to the yoke, dashed the sweat drops from his eyes with such an invincible happiness, that the purpose was revoked and he was confirmed in his manly office. The edict which made Evan a ha'f'lin* made Long Donald's Jock a herd, though the appointment meant lasting durance for the bull.

Thereupon Evan doffed his kilt and donned corduroy breeches, the change costing him nearly all his wages. But he had no thought of standing upon a question of expense, for did the transformation not mean a long, long step towards manhood, that glorious goal of boyish ambitions? Feeling the corded cloth in an ecstasy of self-importance, he pitied the luckless youngsters who had to be content with kilts, and looking forth from his sublime altitude, regarded herding as an experience of his remote youth, a thing for dreams and meditations.

Among horses he was proficient from the first, and he preferred them spirited, that is to say, a trifle risky. If they were biters and kickers he was the better pleased. One day, it was prophesied, he would be found mangled and lifeless under avenging hoofs. Possibly. It was not for common folks, he modestly owned, to gainsay the prophets, but with a sidelong twinkle that plainly implied unbelief, he ventured to inquire what they fancied he would be about while the horse was engaged in the mangling.

His particular favourite was a veteran of inimitable wickedness named Coachy, from its having once worn State harness and flung disdainful spume in the purple face of the driver of the Royal Mail. Even an expert in equine depravity would find it hard to name a vice which this four-footed fiend had not at some time exemplified in its heinous career, or a crime which it had not either attempted or triumphantly accomplished. In its coaching days the whole valley of the Tay rang with its iniquities, so that at stopping-places people crowded to gaze at it as they might gaze at a chained hyena. Its later deeds fully sustained its early reputation. It had bitten half the face off a former ploughman; it had taken Jamie Tosh by the shoulder and shaken him as a terrier shakes a rat; it had sent Neil himself flying from

*Ha'f'lin—a lad who does a man's work for a boy's wage, with the drudgery which neither man nor woman will endure superadded.

its stall with his heart in his mouth; and its minor offences were innumerable. Mr. Macgregor frequently swore he would have it sold or shot for the dogs, but it was tolerated because, in spite of age and ill-temper, it was worth any two ordinary horses in the Strath.

To the venturesome Evan these things endued it with a special fascination. He hung sedulously about it, digging it in the ribs and nibbing it in tender places to hear it squeal and see it fling; and Coachy, watching lynx-like, made several abortive attempts to maim him.

"He'll chaw ye to pulp ane o' thir days," remarked Jamie Tosh on one of these occasions as he saw the nimble Evan dodging. "Ay faith, crunch yer banes to sawdust for ye."

"He'd like to," responded Evan, and he could not help adding maliciously, "Oh! by-the-bye, Jamie, have you got over that bout you had together? It was a bad tussle, I mind."

Fate, as is her feminine way, played into the masterhand. One glorious summer's day the big folk went to the hill to "lift" peats, leaving Evan to the honours and responsibilities of general management. He exercised undisputed sway. His cousins, or such of them as were of any account, were at school, probably blubbering under the application of dominie Proudfoot's black ruler; Lisspeth, as maid of all work, was liquefying fearfully among pots and pitchers indoors; Jock Bean was with the pasturing cattle; the rest were four good miles off among the heather, so that there was none to say, What doest thou? It was his to devise, decree and execute according to his sovereign pleasure.

The sense of absolute authority gave an added airiness to his step, a more radiant and confident beam to his eye. It was a great, an animating thing to rule alone, to look abroad and spy no rival near the throne. But it imposed momentous obligations. Well! and what of that? asked the mounting heart. Is not obligation nectar to ambition? Is not obligation the hero's passport to glory? Evan would as soon think of flying from his own shadow as of failing in his trust. The exclusiveness of his responsibility, far from abating his zeal, acted as a spur to his pride, rendering him almost quixotically nice about the veriest trifle if it appeared to smack of duty. It was a matter of honour. Never should slanderous tongues be able to say that he had been invested with power and proved unworthy. Never. Let all the gods and little fishes take note of the fact. When the



big folk came home they should find things as trim and shipshape as if five score grieves had been charged with the care of Pitweem during their absence.

Late in the afternoon, as he was in the thick of his multifarious activities, he came upon Florence and her maid glumly moping their souls out for lack of diversion. He meant to pass on with such indifferent greeting as a man in hot pursuit of duty might give frivolous girls falling casually in his way. A cry of joy and a clapping of hands, as at a timely and graceful providence, denoted peril of hindrance, and he lengthened his stride. But the next moment my lady had flung herself upon him, as a proved comedian, entreating to be amused. Pulling up with an expression half smile, half frown, he looked curiously in the pleading eyes; then spoke like an oracle moved to irony. Did she imagine it was part of a responsible overseer's business to devise fun for idle people? It were well, he counselled, to correct the hapless notion at once. Whereupon Miss Dudley, fixing upon him an injured, disappointed look, thrust out her red lips upbraidingly. So, this was his chivalry then! Well! thenceforward she would take care to choose more adventurous or more gallant friends. And he would please understand that all must now be over between them. She would never speak to him again, never play with him, never write to him when she got back to England, never send him a card or a story-book at Christmas, nor give any other token of her esteem and affection. There were countless boys in the world who would be proud to do her service and receive her favours; and the round rosy face puckered, and the golden brown curls tossed imperiously in a storm of contemptuous indignation.

Here was a situation of unforeseen delicacy. Wisdom eschews obstinacy, and the discredited knight instinctively thought of compromise. He was clean against deflection that day, yet by steering judiciously near the wind it might be possible to please both sides, to gratify Florence without forfeiting the bloom and perfume of fidelity. So he cast rapidly about for some feasible scheme of amusement, and almost instantly his mind lighted on Coachy, then peaceably munching barley straw in the stable.

His heart gave a jubilant leap; his pulses beat a heady measure to which prudence went skipping and dancing out of mind. Ah; Coachy. It jumped wonderfully with the autocrat's humour to bring matters to a head with that



arch rake and enemy, and the adventure was rich in promise of sport. Two birds with one stone, he thought rapturously; truly a rare stroke of fortune. The peals of laughter and applause which he heard in imagination from the saucy enchantress before him put the last shadow of hesitancy to flight. But before proceeding to business he must have vows of eternal silence. He put an imaginary case. Suppose he were to risk reputation and happiness, would they take their solemnest oath never to divulge the secret? The eager brightness in Florence's face answered before her tongue. What or how many oaths did he require—a thousand, ten thousand, a million? Let him name the number and prescribe the form. He could have just as many as he liked, of any kind he liked, the only condition being haste.

He took the pledges, pointing out on the authority of the Shorter Catechism and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair all that false swearing involved.

"If ever you tell anybody you'll be plumped in a lake of fire and brimstone, and you'll never get out," he said pleasantly. "And when you gnash your teeth and greet for a drink the Black Gentleman will just laugh at you."

They would chance the penalties; was he ready with the fun? His answer was to take up an iron bar that lay convenient, and invite them to the stable.

"It's to be a bit of an argument with Coachy," he explained by the way. "Best man uppermost."

Entering the stable intrepidly, with the bar behind his back, he advanced straight upon Coachy, ordered it about, and stepped lightly into the stall. In a twinkling the brute twisted like a snake, bringing its hind quarter hard against the partition to prevent escape, and the watchers, holding their breath in a tremor of expectation, were electrified by a flash of bare jaws. The iron bar went out bravely, Coachy's head tried odds with the rafters, and Florence gave a shout of glee.

Hardly had it passed her lips when she was dumb and cold with horror. For, gathering itself with a tigerish quickness and ferocity, the horse had turned, reared, and struck Evan down. There was another flash of bare jaws, swifter, wickeder than the first, and the place rang with a piercing cry. That sign of mastery, that wrung-out note of living pain and terror, was to the ravenous Coachy as the taste of blood to a wolf. Seizing its victim in its teeth it lifted and shook him limp, then jerking him between its



forelegs it kneeled upon him with a noise that was part grunt, part snort, part hellish whinny.

At that sickening proof of the beast's victory the spectators, shutting their eyes, fled screaming, and as they flew there came to their ears a curdling shriek which told all too plainly that Coachy was determined then and there to finish his enemy.

Hearing the screams, Mr. Dudley, who chanced to be lolling by an open window with a newspaper on his knee, rushed out to find Florence behaving like a creature frantic with sudden pain and fright.

"Oh, papa!" she cried chokingly at sight of him. "The wild horse is biting and lying on Evan! Oh, papa, run, papa, run! he will be dead. The horse has him down."

"Dead, down," repeated Mr. Dudley aghast. "What is this?" he demanded of the hysterical white-faced maid.

"In the stable, sir," was all she could answer, and he waited for no more.

In the stable he found a spectacle which turned his marrow to ice. The brute still knelt, worrying like a wild boar, and his victim, huddled face downward, appeared a mere inert heap of tattered and bloody clothes. Seizing a graip which stood against the wall, Mr. Dudley drove with all his might at the horse. It desisted, rising with a little shiver, and Evan was clutched and drawn from among its feet.

It seemed he must indeed be dead. His eyes were closed, his lax face had the hue of death, and he was soaked in gore and cruelly torn. A frenzy of revenge came upon Mr. Dudley, and he struck again at Coachy, driving the prongs of the graip deep into the fore-ribs and withdrawing them crimson. It groaned, staggered, made a feeble effort to retaliate, fell against the partition, and collapsed. But Mr. Dudley neither saw nor heeded, for he was lifting Evan upon some convenient straw. As he bent over the passive form looking for signs of life, the coachman, who had been absent on an errand, entered.

"This is a bad business," said Mr. Dudley, glancing into the scared and inquiring face of the man. "But, thank God, he is not dead. Come and help me get him into the house."

Between them they lifted the pitiable figure, then taking him in his arms as softly and tenderly as any mother could, Mr. Dudley carried him into the dwelling-house and laid him upon a bed. The womenfolk, terrified into speechless-

ness, clustered round silently with drawn, bloodless faces, but Florence wept in a passion of distress.

"Oh, papa, I think it was my fault," she sobbed, when her father spoke to her, for she had a rare courage. "What shall I do, papa, if poor Evan is dead?"

"He is not dead, darling," replied her father soothingly. "You must not cry like that, it might disturb him." And instantly the little heroine crammed her handkerchief into her mouth to stifle the sobs.

"Poor little chap, he's got a bad mauling though," remarked Mr. Dudley to the company at large. "But it's fortunate his face is not disfigured." And as the words were spoken Evan opened his eyes as from a dream. For a moment he stared blankly at the company of faces, then started as if to rise.

"Where am I?" he demanded; but his swimming senses collecting themselves, he added with a pleading look at Mr. Dudley, "I am very sorry, sir, but please don't tell. They said I was not to go near Coachy. I don't know how I let him knock me down."

"No," answered Mr. Dudley, gently brushing back the damp hair with his open hand. "I won't tell; nobody will tell. There now, lie perfectly quiet." And with a little sigh and a head that still swam Evan lay back.

Having composed and made his patient as easy as possible, Mr. Dudley went outside, and the coachman hastened to inform that the horse lay dying, pierced, as it appeared, to the heart.

"Cut his infamous throat, then," said Mr. Dudley. "It'll put him out of pain, though he richly deserves slow torture. That done saddle the black mare and ride for Dr. Forbes as hard as ever she can carry you. Tell him it's an urgent surgical case; explain the mauling; say there are probably bones broken, that certainly the flesh is cruelly riven and torn, and bring him instantly. If he is from home fetch any other doctor you can find, and at all hazards make haste."

Twenty minutes later the housewives of Aberfourie were startled by a desperate clatter of hoofs and the vision of a spurring rider, while the fat constable swelled with rage and a desire for vengeance, for that excellent and zealous officer narrowly escaped being ridden down.

END OF BOOK I.



BOOK II.—THE TIME OF ROSES

All heaven is a maiden's blush,
In which the soul doth speak
That it was you who sent the flush
Into the maiden's cheek.

COLERIDGE.

CHAPTER I

WITHIN an hour the watchers by Evan's bedside were heartened by the accents of Dr. Forbes giving directions about his horse. Hardly had he flung the reins to his attendant, when Dugald, tingling with a sense of tragedy, caught the twinkle of cart wheels and harness buckles on a crest half a mile away. "The peat-lifters," he cried, and his heart beat in a pleasurable tumult at thought of what was in store for them. To bide their coming was out of the question, for he was fermenting like a yeasty vat; so he scurried to meet them, bawling as he drew near that Coachy was dead, that Evan was hurt and dying, and that the doctor had just arrived post-haste. The expression of blank, gaping consternation upon which he had counted was immediate. The cart stopped with a jerk, all in it springing to their feet and looking down upon him with startled eyes and blenching faces.

"Coachy dead, Evan hurt and dying!" came from them in a kind of hoarse chorus.

"Yes," said Dugald in panting ardour, "Coachy's lying dead in the stable, and Evan is lying on Mr. Dudley's bed."

There was no need to explain the connection between boy and horse. With an inarticulate cry David leapt from the cart and was off in a distracted race to learn the worst; the others, save Bob Conacher, who drove, following hard after him. He was the oldest and feeblest among them, but he



was first at the house. Mr. Dudley stood at the garden gate waiting for them with the humane intention of breaking the shock; but though he strove to be calm and even cheerful, calamity was writ too large on his face to be concealed or dissembled.

"Oh, sir, what has happened?" gasped David, and he looked as if he would clutch the other to pluck out the answer quick enough.

"There has been an accident," said Mr. Dudley quietly.

"He is not dead? Tell us is he dead?" cried Jessie, thrusting forward an ashy countenance beside her father's.

"No, no," replied Mr. Dudley quickly, "he is not dead, nor likely to die just yet; but he is hurt a bit, and in your absence we judged it best to send for Dr. Forbes."

"It will pe that prute Coachy again, sir," put in the heaving, puffing Neil.

Mr. Dudley nodded.

"And for its sins you will find it with a hole in its heart and its windpipe severed," he said.

"Gosh pless my soul alive!" ejaculated Neil, "that is killing and sticking extrornar. Nefer mind, too; let the dogs haf him, let the dogs haf him, and tear him, and eat him, and crunch his wicked pones: the gamekeeper will pe gey and glad: he was wanting an old horse the other day. Where is Evan?"

Mr. Dudley led the way into the house, where they found Dr. Forbes on the point of making his preliminary examination. Evan lay very white and still, but as they entered he cast an imploring look as if to say, "I know I am very much to blame for getting into this condition; I ought to have done better: but please don't be angry with me."

In the same moment the doctor turned a cheery countenance upon the line of straining faces.

"Ha!" he exclaimed in his most buoyant manner, "here we are, all to the fore yet: and how's everybody? Glorious weather for the peats, Pitweem. But you're always in luck. The Tay may run dry, but you'll have salmon. A trifling accident here, David. Boys will be boys, and I declare to you it would go ill with the world if they were anything else—old wives with grey beards, for instance. Ho, ho! come in by, peeping Jessie, and take off that scared face. There are no grandmother's ghosts about at this time of day."



With himself precept and example went hand in hand. A man of generous presence, exuberant spirits, and a face ruddy with sun, wind, rain, and good-will, he diffused sunshine like a second orb. In the sick-room his mission seemed to be to laugh disease and pain out of existence, as if a timely jest were the best resource of science, and the graver the case the greater his cheerfulness. What baseless falsehoods he perpetrated from pure love of humanity the Recording Angel alone knows, if, indeed, that stern registrar was not seduced into winking at benignant fibs. For, in spite of his grim office, Fate's dispassionate roll-keeper may possibly have glints of humour, may be liable to twinges of human sympathy, and consequently to opportune fits of blindness. Be that as it may, it is certain that if everlasting bliss depended on the will of his people, Dr. Forbes would have the cosiest corner in Paradise.

"Never such a man," they said, marvelling at his exhaustless geniality. "Thinks of nothing but making poor folk happy."

"Ay," some one would respond, capping the universal praise, "he even forgets to chairge whiles."

It was impossible to go beyond that.

Smiling and chatting lightly, as if nothing of particular moment to anybody had happened, the doctor turned back to his patient.

"Well! my little man," he observed blithely, "we'll just find out the exact result of your dispute with that cantankerous brute. And you'd scarcely believe how quick we'll be about it, and how easy it'll be. Just see if it's not all over while you're waiting for it to begin. Now," taking Evan gently in his arms, "we'll just move round a little, and you'll give us a sample of the bravery you showed in tackling such a formidable antagonist."

He peered into ugly blood-red wounds, David watching with every furrow in his face a tiny runnel, and Jessie with fingers that unconsciously strove to wring themselves from joint to joint.

"H'm, you've had it out together," said the doctor. "Draw a long breath, my little man; as deep as ever you can. That's it."

When the inspiration was at the full the surgeon's fingertips touched a spot at the lower ribs, and Evan shrank together with a sharp cry.



"A kind of stitch," remarked the doctor almost gaily. "Well! it's all as clear and simple as daylight, and we'll be on our feet again in no time. But are we going to lie here, or are we going home?" he asked, glancing at those about him. "If we're going to lie here, well and good; if not, this is the time to take up our bed and walk."

David and Jessie spoke out, in the same breath, in favour of going home.

"That's natural and sensible," said the doctor, proceeding to roll his patient in sheets and blankets to the similitude of a mammoth baby in long clothes. "Be good enough to get your largest and easiest arm-chair, and two stout fellows to carry it. You're to ride in an open palanquin, my fortunate friend," he added in answer to a questioning look from Evan, "as fine, if you please, as the Grand Mogul himself."

The chair was brought, Bob Conacher and Jamie Tosh presenting themselves as bearers; then, as gingerly as if it were egg-china and might crumble among his hands, the doctor lifted his roll of bed-clothes, and set it in the palanquin of old mahogany and horsehair.

"Now, if you fellows shake or jolt, by the Lord Harry I'll have you up for manslaughter," he said, by way of instructions. "A nice slow, easy rhythmic swing if you like, but, for your lives, no jerking. Take particular care, please, going through doors and round corners. Now then."

The procession started, the doctor walking close on one side of the chair with a hand out to steady it, David close upon the others, Jessie pressing in, now here and now there, as she got a chance, and Mr. Dudley and Neil bringing up the rear.

Evan was laid on an ancient four-poster which was drawn to the window, the curtains being flung back for light. A fresh examination was made, this time with a prying scientific minuteness that made flesh and nerves quiver and brows ooze a clammy sweat.

"He's not hurt for life, is he, doctor?" asked David in an agony of apprehension, when at last the doctor lifted his head.

"You will be havering, David," was the animating response. "Hurt for life? tut, tut! just laid by for a bit holiday. You leave the laddie to me, David, to me and auld Grannie Nature; between us, I think, we've secrets that'll do the job.



Hadn't I the honour of bringing this young gentleman into the world?"

"You had, doctor."

"I thought so. I mind the fine face of his mother yet: God, David, he's like her. Well! we're not going to let him give us the slip just yet as if he were tired of us and our company."

In order to frustrate any secret design of escape that might be cherished by the patient, the doctor whipped off his coat and tucked up his sleeves as if for a boxing or wrestling match. Then, with a clandestine and felonious air, he took from a small hand-bag a mass of lints and bandages, and some glimmering steel instruments with ugly probing points. David thrilled icily at sight of them, and Jessie, though endowed with excellent nerves, was overcome by sudden nausea.

All at once the doctor's face took on a shade of grimness, and he bent forward whispering in Mr. Dudley's ear.

"Two ribs to set and some work for the needle: will you hold him?" was what he said.

Mr. Dudley replied in the affirmative.

"Then," said the doctor, bending still closer, "you must hold for your life, and the more he cries out hold the harder."

"But you will administer chloroform," suggested Mr. Dudley.

"Oh, God bless me! no," returned the doctor quickly; and one might have fancied from his expression he had been asked to commit foul murder. "No, no, we make no experiments. Hospitals and paupers for that. And as you wish him a speedy recovery, grip tight when he struggles. Remember that to relax for so much as half a second would ruin everything. You're sure of your nerve?"

"Quite; but I thought chloroform was always administered in cases like this."

"We are not city doctors playing with human lives, Mr. Dudley. That way may lie sudden death. Are you ready?"

Mr. Dudley gave an emphatic nod.

"Very well," said the doctor, looking full in his assistant's eyes to insure himself of the valour behind them. "We'll get it over, then."

Thereupon he turned with his customary good humour to David and Jessie.

"The room is rather on the small side," he said, "and too many of us would make it oppressive. You'll just dander up the knowe for a mouthful of fresh air. We won't be a jiffy, but you're not to come back till you're called. We want to have a surprise for you, as the children say."

They went slowly and with backward looks, as if weights dragged heavily at their heartstrings. At a sign from the doctor Neil quietly locked the door behind them; the patient was finally adjusted and the operation began.

To science and the race at large the ordeal is a common, every-day affair, but to the individual it is ever an infinite terror, like death and the stripes of fortune. Evan braced himself with a fortitude which amazed even the doctor. His fingers, clenching like vices, drove the nails deep into his palms, and the blood squirted from lips gripped between set teeth to smother the cry of torture. But Nature is ill to conquer. At the rasp of broken bones and the pang of piercing needle not all the force of resolution could repress the acute scream and protest, the shuddering contortion and roll of beaded sweat. Compared with the surgeon's steel the horse's jaws seemed mercy itself. Evan never dreamed how pain could make the head whirl and turn light to darkness till that experience came upon him.

But at last the patching and stitching and bandaging were accomplished, and the doctor, mopping his brow with his shirt sleeve, said that David and Jessie might be readmitted.

"Well, we're going to do very nicely," he remarked as they stepped in, their drawn faces and wide fearful eyes directed to the bed. "Everything has gone precisely as it should go. We'll soon be skipping again, David. But it's warm work," mopping himself once more. "And it's a bit warm too for the knitting process which Mother Nature will presently begin. But we're young; young, and sweet of constitution. No whisky inflaming our system. Oh, I'm sure we'll do nicely—very nicely indeed."

The patient, swathed like a mummy, thought it extremely doubtful whether he should do nicely or do at all. But he was too far spent to express his thoughts, and the others were all eagerness to believe.

Evan lacked nothing that care or means could bestow. Mr. Dudley charged himself with the tender duty of seeing to the boy's welfare, and Neil became emulative; so that



Evan on his back fared infinitely better than Evan had ever fared on his feet. Daily supplies of fruit, jellies, and other rare delicacies reached him from Pitweem; chicken broth was made for him and the limbs of chickens were given him to devour. He had baker's bread too, from Aberfourie, crusty and sour with alum, and delicious farrels, light as down and white as snow, and sometimes even teacakes, though at this the doctor shook his head. The eternal porridge was tabooed as tending to product febrile disturbances, and as digestion waited unfailingly on appetite, cook and baker could not have had a more appreciative consumer.

Dr. Forbes, with whom Neil had privately arranged matters, made regular visits and each time was able to report that "we" were doing "very nicely, very nicely indeed." In the first stages the knitting fibres set up an intermittent fever which was not alleviated by the stifling oven-like heat of the windless July and early August nights. There were times when Evan would have given all present and prospective possessions for one cool breath upon the burning sheets, one hour's respite from the fruitless endeavour to cheat pain by counting the moments as they were wearily measured by the clock.

Nevertheless the progress, if less rapid than it might have been with the aid of contemned antiseptics, was steady and satisfactory. The blood was pure, as the doctor remarked, the constitution sound as a new bell, the floating germs were few, and there were no complications.

To beguile the tedium of convalescence Mr. Dudley sent to his English home for books, for David Kinloch's library was not of the kind to fascinate youth. It consisted of the Bible with Matthew Henry's Commentary, Fox's "Book of Martyrs," "The Scots Worthies," "The Westminster Confession of Faith," "The Holy War," Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," "A History of the Covenanters," a "Life of Calvin," some "Sermons" by Dr. Chalmers, "The Headship of Christ" by Hugh Miller, a book of Religious Precepts, and volumes of a Free Church periodical.

One little book it contained, however, which set Evan strangely a-thinking. It was devotional in spirit, but as may be imagined its spell lay not in its piety. What gave it its peculiar value, its intimate and hallowed charm, was an inscription which already, because of poor ink, was turning

to a pallid yellow. The writing, in a sharp feminine hand, was brief and ran thus:

To my darling Evan from his loving Mother, and beneath in inverted commas, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you."

The heart that prompted and the hand that wrote the words were crumbling to dust; he had stood above them among the daisies, and leaned on the grey headstone, wondering in his childish way why people had to die and be buried. He thought he understood now; dimly he had to own, yet with a certain mystical clearness that awed him, how the grave was after all but a passage-way to another and a fairer world which existed somewhere far, far off in bright azure spaces. He seemed to see a great procession thronging through a black cavernous opening in a mountainous wall to burst into endless sunshine beyond. His mother was *there*, not really under the daisies in spite of swelling turf and puzzling headstone; and here was her last word to him, the best message that love could devise.

One day when he was alone Evan took the open book to his breast, thinking with suffused eyes of the fair figure that hung bright in his imagination. He just remembered her shining hair and wistful, longing look. He had often been told how on the last night she had taken him to her arms as with a presentiment of the end, crooning him sweetly to sleep as had been her custom in happier days, and how in the grey morning hours he had been snatched bewildered from her side; for after a long dalliance the grim emissary all at once became imperative. He had poignant remembrances too of his own tempest of anguish as he pleaded in vain with her to speak to him. Never should he forget, were his days to be a thousand years, the heart-wrench, the burning horror of despair which seemed like searing-irons at the roots of his being, when he found that her ear was shut against his appeal. Dead! his mother dead! No, no! there was some fearful error. The gracious God about whom she had so often told him, to whom she had taught him to pray, could not be so cruel as to take her away. That had been his cry as he bathed the rigid face with his tears; and for awhile he was inconsolable.

Time and fresh interests had dissipated his grief, but could not destroy the memory of it. In the stillness of the

lone room it all came back to him very vividly and with stirrings of dewy emotion. How would it be, he asked himself, if she had not gone? Would his life be different? Would she take his part when he got into trouble? Would she have a finer understanding of his trials than others had, and a readier pity when he went wrong? And when fever burned would she lay a cool, soothing hand upon his hot brow?

Being a poet for the moment he re-created the past, setting a sweet winsome presence in the full light of the foreground of his magical picture. His eyes seemed to dazzle as he gazed upon her, noting the ardent look, the smile that warmed and comforted like a cordial, the perfect curves of the oval, comely face, the yearning beauty of the eyes. Her very breathing seemed audible; the soft, persuasive tones of her voice thrilled in his ear like a strain of weird music. And as he dreamed his impassioned dream, all at once her arms were about him and her kisses pouring on his lips like warm honey. He drank them in with a fiery, passionate thirst, pressing vehemently for more, and clinging with all the force and filial intensity of heart and soul and sense. That was a thing divine, a fusing and mingling of being with being till each was lost in the other and both in an unspeakable joy. Suddenly as it came the illusion vanished, and he sank back with a wildly fluttering heart and a dizzy drunken brain, clasping the book tighter to his breast. But the impression, struck on the instant into his mind, remained engraven as "with lead in the rock for ever."

From the other books he had, with the fine discrimination of a boy, taken just what suited him. The narrative parts of the Bible he knew well and relished. The whole-hearted, thorough manner in which Hebrew kings and warriors did their business stirred him gratefully; but it is to be feared he neglected the invaluable commentaries and expositions of the good Mr. Henry. The gorier exploits of the Covenanters animated him to a pleasurable warmth, and for Claverhouse, despite the man's incontestable wickedness, he had so cordial an admiration that he regretted it had not been his lot to ride by that stained bridle-rein. Some old-fashioned cuts likewise exercised a potent fascination, in particular two representing the battles of Bothwell Brig and Drumclog. For hours he would pore over them, imagining himself cutting and hewing in the thickest of the fight. But these

interests were soon exhausted; and the remaining portion of the library merely provoked fatiguing fits of yawning.

Mr. Dudley's benefactions, therefore, came as drink to the parched; certainly as refreshment to the weary. The books were such as one reads once with gusto, and regrets for a lifetime that the first delicious sensation cannot be repeated. "Ivanhoe," "Rob Roy," "Old Mortality" (wherein the master of the vivid and picturesque again depicted Drumclog and Bothwell Brig), "Crusoe," "Gulliver," "Oliver Twist" and "Pickwick," "The Cruise of the Midge," "Cook's Voyages," and, crown of all, "The Arabian Nights" —these, and other works of magic, annihilated time and space, and revealed whole realms of enchantment. David looked askance on idle tales: he had never owned or read a novel in his life, and it was with some compunctions of conscience he permitted one in his house; but he held his peace, and his less scrupulous son yielded without thought of Creed or Catechism to the spell of the magicians. It was the first step in a path that was to lead far from the homely ways of David; far too from the starched, self-sufficing orthodoxies of the ruling platitudinarians of Logieburn parish. But this was not suspected, because there was neither prophet nor son of prophet among them.

Mr. Dudley, who had a taste for books, was fond of talking to the boy about his reading, and was surprised by the quick intelligence and acumen of his comments and answers. One day Dr. Forbes was told of his young patient's keenness and alertness, his trooping fancies and flashing intuitions. David listened with rapt ears, but the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, who had seized the chance of driving with the doctor to remind the sufferer that we are all mortal, puckered his mouth and smiled sapiently. The doctor did not notice either the pucker or the smile, for he was declaring with quite superfluous warmth that Evan must have a chance, must be educated and made a man of.

"Put him to medicine, David," he cried in his lusty, inspiriting way. "Put him to medicine, and when he's got his degree I know a place for him. By the time he has learned how little the physician knows of the ailments that flesh is heir to, my days will be over, my sign down."

"I hope not, doctor," said David fervently.

"Ah, David," rejoined the doctor, "we medical men don't preach. We leave that"—glancing at the Rev. Murdoch—



"to them who are better acquainted with sin and the pit. But there is one thing we are under no delusion about, and that is that a doctor's life is no longer than another man's—is, indeed, generally shorter, which shows you may die of disease which it is your business to cure. The man who daily fights death needn't be dragged to kirk to hear about the shortness of life. Physician, heal thyself: the taunt is a good deal older than our science, and hasn't lost its sting. You go ahead, David; when Evan's ready there's be a pair of empty shoes for him."

"You're a rare dreamer, doctor," remarked the Rev. Murdoch Macnair dryly; and he presented Evan with some tracts directed against the evils of worldly ambition and the sin of being discontented with our lot. The reverend gentleman was serene in the conviction that the day had long gone by when anything good could come out of Nazareth.

Drinking a cup of tea that afternoon with Lisspeth, and talking between times of spiritual and mundane affairs, he mentioned the matter to that worthy lady, feeling sure of her sympathy and concurrence.

"Am no so shure, sir," responded Mrs. Macgregor, to his infinite astonishment. "I will pe thinking a goot deal of Evan just the now, and am no at all shure. Mr. Dudley has great speaking of him; and if Evan will take a thing into his head, sir"—she shook her own as the only way of giving any adequate idea of the lengths to which he might go. But the Rev. Murdoch Macnair declined to be moved in his incredulity, for he had a son of his own whom he designed as successor to Dr. Forbes.

CHAPTER II

THE doctor's words kept ringing in David's ears with an electric tingle that made his heart leap in his bosom. "Put him to medicine. When he's ready there'll be a pair of empty shoes for him." Evan, the hapless, sorely-abused, readily-erring, irrepressible Evan, a doctor, a great and learned man! Would Heaven indeed grant that most ardent prayer of a father's heart? At the thought of the wild

possibility David rose as on wings till he moved sublimely in the misty region of the clouds. There was a kind of intoxication in the ethereal experience as if he had drained a goblet of rare celestial vintage. Whom the gods deign to dandle on their knees may well be rapturous, and there were moments when David scarce knew the familiar earth he trod on. Only the long rigorous habit of self-restraint, practised till it became a second nature, kept him from proclaiming his joy from the housetop.

In the evening, when the imagination had returned from its dizzying flights and the fever of elation had subsided, he took counsel with Jessie, his sole confidential adviser; and Evan, blinking among the shadows, pricked his ears to hear himself and his prospects discussed.

"It is the wish of my heart," said David. "But how is it to be done? A college education is very costly, and we have nothing."

Jessie began her reply by kissing him.

"Now, father dear, we are not going to start by wrapping ourselves in wet blankets to find out how cold it is. Mind the saying, What has been done can be done again. Poor boys have gone to college before this, and Evan's going too. That's decided, to begin with. Here are two hands to help," and she held them out. "Besides, I have great faith in the rogue himself. There are prizes and bursaries, you know; take my word for it Evan will have his share of them."

"You are a good girl, Jessie," said her father, in an uncertain voice. "It would be a fine thing to send Evan to college. I have dreamed of it many a long day through, and the sorer I had to work I dreamed of it the more; but, Jessie, I would rather see him a minister than a doctor."

"Either would do," said Jessie, with conviction.

"To preach the Word of God," said David, with deep reverence, "to lead sinners to the throne. There is the highest thing in this world—above principalities, above powers, ay, above all we can feel or think. Eh, but I would like to see Evan in the pulpit."

"So would I," responded Jessie briskly. "Yet I'm thinking there are good men in the world who do not dust pulpit cushions. We had a minister and a doctor here this very day, and I have my own notion which of them had most grace in his heart."



"Judge not, that ye be not judged, Jessie."

"That is a good thing to mind," owned the little casuist. "Yet one cannot help thinking sometimes of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and wondering if the tribe is dead. What is it if a man goes into the pulpit who has no call?"

"Everlasting damnation," answered David, in a tone of awe. "Better death in the hour of birth, better the millstone about the neck and the deep sea, than that. We have clear assurance what will happen when the Lord puts on vengeance like a garment to deal with the false shepherd and them that turn His temple into a place of gain. You mind who used the scourge and said, 'Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.' To preach in God's name with a worldly heart or a heart astray is more than murder; for it is killing the soul, Jessie, killing the soul, and that sin will not be forgiven. This hand would strike Evan dead to save him from that fearful thing."

Jessie forbore to press her point, and a general discussion of ways and means ensued. She told how much she could earn to push their scheme, related all the tales she had ever heard or could invent of clever students waxing rich on bursaries, described how she would send supplies and provide clothes—in a word, proved conclusively by the clinching logic of the heart that nothing in the world was easier than to give her brother a university course. David went to bed with a mind aglow and a heart uplifted to God. If he could but hear his boy preach the Gospel he would go, when the time came, exclaiming, with Simeon of old, *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.*

Mr. Dudley was an enthusiastic advocate of the university plan. It would be nothing less than criminal, he declared, to deny the boy an opportunity, and he was lamentably ignorant of human nature if Evan would not astonish them all yet. Ah! could he have known what a prophet he was; could he have guessed in what manner the astonishment was to come! But, happily, the sagest of men is not permitted to be wise before the event.

Sometimes Mr. Dudley spoke of men and citites in the South, and then he would notice his protégé's countenance kindle with curiosity and intelligence. It was a singularly mobile face, an actor's face, as Mr. Dudley reflected; and at times he humorously allowed himself to picture the hor-

ror of the "unco guid and the rigidly righteous" if this child of Calvin should go forth to tread the godless boards. But again he felt there was much more than the mimetic instinct behind those rapid, eloquent changes of expression. Already there were distinct intimations that Evan Kinloch would never be content merely to play at being great, that he would do and not pretend, and, withal, that he was a born sentimentalist and addicted to dreaming romantic dreams. And so talking, noting, telling tales and listening, questioning, commenting, vaulting gaily into the future and erecting fairy fabrics there, the two slipped into an intimacy that might have been thought impossible between persons so widely separated in age, in position, in outlook, in every outward condition. But kinship of spirit does not stay to reckon external disparities.

David was present at some of these talks, and drank in the syllables as the desert drinks rain. The speculations respecting the future often affected him to dizziness, always to a delightful sense of exhilaration. He seemed to be transported into a lighter, sunnier atmosphere, wherein elation was the natural and inevitable feeling. The idea of the university never left his mind. It was with him in the field; it was with him in the closet; day and night, waking or sleeping, working or resting, it possessed him; giving existence a fresh motive, a novel zest and relish.

He was himself surprised how things changed. The crabbed, angular world began to smile in graceful, alluring shapes; the grey hues turned to a lightsome, wondrous richness; the sun shone with an added blitheness; the harsh air became bland; the burden of time slipped imperceptibly from drooping shoulders; something of the gallant elasticity of youth returned to the step, something of the gay confidence of youth to the carriage. For the horizon was again rosy with promise. It was still dim how the delicious dreams were to be realised. But the ardour that removes mountains burned in David's soul, and he lifted head and heart as to beat of drum or song of triumphal march.

It appeared as if Providence were raising aiders and advocates to quicken his courage and urge the execution of his designs. Calling casually one day, the district schoolmaster, Peter Proudfoot, heard of the university plan and instantly caught fire. Unquestionably Evan must go to college and distinguish himself. What in Heaven's name



did Heaven give brains for? the dominie would like to know. Let them see to it that no time was lost, and he on his part would take care that the decks were immediately cleared for action. Tingling with gladness, yet fearful of yielding to vain and perhaps impious imaginings, David hinted something of the hazards of the venture and the chances of failure. Mr. Proudfoot turned upon him with an eye of rebuke.

"Did you ever hear how the Greeks got to Troy?" asked the schoolmaster.

"No," said David, whose historical reading had not extended to Grecian enterprise.

"Faith, they say just by dint of trying. And I never heard that a better way of getting what you want has been discovered since."

"I am answered," said David, smiling as one smiles who is confirmed in a cherished conviction.

Other circumstances also conduced to buoyancy and serenity of mind. The reconciliation with Neil was complete, and had been effected without violence to pride or self-respect. Indeed, the brothers-in-law were drawn together as they had never been drawn before. The storm that had cleared the thunderous atmosphere in general had likewise purged and purified certain visions in particular. Neil, to his own frequent amazement and disquietude, began to discern with the eyes of the heart, and developed a taste for benevolence. This taste was displayed capriciously, as if studied kindness were the merest chance in the world, or shyly and shamefacedly, as if it were a weakness to be owned with a blush when it could not be concealed. Like the Man of Ross, he was happiest in doing good by stealth, and if by any means his right hand outwitted his left in making amends for the past, his secret joy was ineffable.

"He is not very strong, poor man," he would remark, if forced to have recourse to explanations in allotting the lighter tasks to David, and if he fancied any one suspected his motive, he would add with an air of indifference, "Man, it's a great pity we grow old. The thought of what Adam brought on us is enough to make a body swear." And then he would laugh as if after all Adam's transgression were a standing jest to the race.

Even Lisspeth had softened, and though that excellent lady would die rather than express contrition, her de-

meanour seemed to suggest a vague regret for what had taken place. It said volumes that she was content to let bygones be bygones, that she spoke considerately to Jessie, and visited Evan, taking him little presents of sweet butter and pocketfuls of gooseberries, upon which she generally sat down before remembering she had them. Mr. Dudley was yet more gracious, and as Evan got steadily well the Kinloch household basked in a cosy radiance it had not known for many years.

So the summer dozed into autumn with supernal splendours and scenic enchantments of which the appreciative glensmen disdained, for the most part, to take any note whatever. The pictorial embellishments of the heavens were of value only in so far as they enabled one to forecast the weather for the afternoon or the morrow; the adornments of earth as they bore on the state of the crops. Otherwise they were all mere frivolities, fittingly acknowledged by a scornful glance or grunt when some chattering stranger, enamoured of the sound of his own voice, made them the theme of a rhapsody, or gabbled incomprehensively about the relations of Art and Nature.

For the rest they abjured change, held fast by the Shorter Catechism, which said nothing of salvation through natural beauty, and took the weather as it came with curt speech and definite judgments. When the sun shone it was a fine day; when the winds rioted, hounding the distracted clouds from horizon to horizon, levelling trees, demolishing gables or carrying off thatched roof, it was blowy; when it rained it was wet. What more was to be said? Assuredly Logieburn parish said no more, for the chief concern of Logieburn parish was to get butter on its bread.

None the less the fantastic mother of artists indulged her passion for shows and spectacles, bright pomps and insubstantial pageantries. Day by day she spread the curtains of her tabernacle in azure and sapphire and crimson and gold, coming and going in chariots of flame, as if gorgeous impalpabilities were the particular need of a hungering world. And presently the mid-summer glow softened imperceptibly into the pathos of the declining year. The silvery aureolas that crowned the multiple peaks at dawn became draggled mists that trailed ever lower and lower down upon shoulder and flank, like tattered draperies, and lingered later and later, rising at length when the sun grew imperious, not



to reveal purple blush and shimmer of varied bloom, but a pearly glitter that suggested sodden soil and soaked herbage. In the valley and upon the lower slopes the fields whitened and the harvest was reaped; hips and haws, sloes and blackberries allured kilted adventurers to grief among thorns; the sapless foliage assumed the scarlet and russet of dissolution; the air got sharp and the dews drenching and cold; the linns began to bloom in the frosty nights, the streams sang with a deeper note, and grey skies closed in oppressively.

CHAPTER III

BUSINESS and the sharpening October air drove the Dudleys south with expressions of regret and a promise to return another year. The Highlands, they were gracious enough to say, had fairly enchanted them, and they should always be interested in the friends they had made there. Florence, who grieved most over the surrender of holiday freedom, kissed her favourites all round, a mark of esteem which Master Evan received with a doubtful face and an inward imprecation on the foolishness of little girls. Mrs. Macgregor deftly smothered her grief in the corner of a huge apron, and Mr. Macgregor, gratefully fingering the coin in his right-hand breeches pocket, intimated that Pitweem was theirs as often as it might please them to come back.

The last words were an admonition from Mr. Dudley to David and Evan respecting the day-dream of the university.

"When I return," he said to the latter, standing with his foot on the carriage step, "I shall expect to find you a scholar. Please do not disappoint me."

No time was lost in making a tentative beginning. Within a week Burnside school opened, and Evan, with no sign or relic of hurt upon him, was among the first to hasten to the feet of Gamaliel Proudfoot.

It is not to be hastily inferred, however, that the young gentleman was consumed by a passion for knowledge. Logically auguring for the future from experience of the past, he looked forward to a strenuously active rather than

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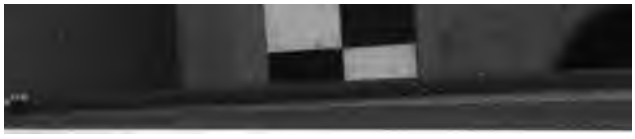


a studious winter. Books, as he well knew, were not the staple study at Burnside.

The session opened auspiciously with tales of the adventures with horse and doctor. Gaping admirers felt the hero's arm and ribs curiously, asking many fearsome questions about sewn flesh and broken bones, and the hero replied with that sense of superiority proper to the veteran who has fought, bled, and conquered. When the examination was over he requested them to be good enough to note his fitness for the usual course of athletics, and hinted as delicately as might be that in scrimmages any presumption of a disabled condition would probably be imprudent. They received the hint with a clear cognizance of its value and turned to the winter programme of sports and pastimes.

Burnside school in those days had an unique reputation, not wholly scholastic. Mr. Peter Proudfoot, the sole director of its destinies, was a dominie of an uncommon stamp, original, ironic, and inveterately addicted to having his own way. As no School Board hampered him with its omniscience, and Government inspectors gave him a wide berth, he treated the raw material submitted to him precisely according to his humour, which was often odd and ocasionally outrageous. He bore sway with a big black ruler, which he used energetically and generally with perfect impartiality, on the principle that useful knowledge is best imparted by muscular force. It was said the bumps he raised in the cause of learning were sometimes as big as the heads that bore them. But that may have been a rustic exaggeration. It may safely be averred, however, there was not a male pupil in the school without these excrescences to testify to the master's zeal. Once or twice he imparted the virtue of the rod too freely; then a boy would take to bed with a damaged skull and ravings of brain fever. But Logieburn boys being of a tough texture no case terminated fatally, so that in spite of parental grumblings Mr. Proudfoot was never called upon to explain his eccentricities to the Procurator Fiscal.

His titular overseers were the Rev. Robert Whittock and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, representing the interests of the Established and Free Kirks respectively. Once a year, usually in spring, these grave and eminent ministers of the Gospel examined the children in the Shorter Catechism, the doctrinal parts of the Bible, and some other subjects, in-



cluding such easy arithmetic, geography, and grammar as they chanced themselves to remember. One or two picked pupils would give a rendering of "The Destruction of Sennacherib," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," "Lord Ullin's Daughter," or a selection from "Marmion," carefully eliminating the meaning and studiously misplacing emphasis, accent, and gesture. The parents generally attended in bevies to witness their darlings mangling the poets or struggling fearfully with Effectual Calling, the mysteries of the Redemption, the theological tenets of St. Paul, the Seven-horned Beast, or the reason for Jeremiah's Lamentations. Sometimes the excitement was intense, and murmurs of applause or sympathy were frequent as the youthful wrestler did well or ill. As he or she was usually worsted the sympathy naturally predominated.

"Poor thing!" a mother would whisper to her gossip; "I haf a good mind when I kent just as little mysel. How can a wee bittie of a laddie or a lassie care for Jeremiah? Not that I will be running the man down; it would serve us all to mind what he says: but it iss not in human natir to be in love with him, at twelve and ten too."

"Ay," would come the answer, "and that St. Paul, as sure's death he iss a stickler. He's a fine apostel am no misdootin', but he iss uncanny. I never could make him just oot, and as for Effectual Calling and the beast with all the horns, the Lord save us from them. They're beyond my comprehension."

So criticism and fellow-feeling ran.

It said unspeakable things for Christianity that the Rev. Robert Whittock and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, though inevitably regarding each other with the profound contempt proper to the exponents of rival creeds, never came to an open breach. But on school examination days, when one had brought a stammering, fear-struck urchin to the brink of despair, making the trembling little sinner imagine he was already in perdition, the other took him in hand blithely like a cross-examining barrister to pervert his evidence out of his own mouth. It was then that the luckless witness to the variants of Calvinistic Grace and Church Government invariably came to grief. The Rev. Robert Whittock and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair would smile complacently or shake a sapient head as the tide of testimony happened to ebb or flow, to run favourably or the reverse; and Mr.

Proudfoot's fingers would twitch viciously among his coat tails. As righteousness ruled the world, thick heads should suffer when the black ruler got a chance.

It was as escape from the Inquisition when at last the ordeal was over, and the ill-written little books with the red covers (emblems of sin) and the obtrusive morals were presented to those who had guessed best where all were at sea. At the word of liberty the scholars bolted as from the face of Satan; and the Rev. Robert Whittock and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, having exchanged cold civilities with the dominie, would go off with some of the more prosperous members of their congregations to regale on such varieties of choice goose, turkey or lamb, of cream, fresh butter, and scone, as a farm afforded, and expose each other's errors in doctrine.

Mr. Proudfoot, left in the loneliness of his academy, cheered himself with a drop of mountain dew, commenting between whiles to empty benches on the amenity and enlightenment of the pulpit.

"A pair of Daniels," he would observe between the pulls, "yea, Daniels come to judgment. As wise, by the great gods, as Balaam's beast that spoke oracles. *Asinus vulgaris*, which is to say a tame ass. Most learned cuddies! most reverend jackasses!" And thrusting out his nether lip Mr. Proudfoot would comfort himself afresh.

His notes of admiration are to be taken for what they are worth. It may have been a case of sour grapes, for there was a time when Peter Proudfoot indulged the hope of one day having a manse of his own. Five-and-twenty years before he had done brilliant things as a student, and his name may still be read among the lists of prizemen in the Arts Course of a leading Scottish University.

What went wrong was a matter of various gossip and many legends. There were dark whispers of the wine cup and the scarlet woman; there was a suspicion of heterodoxy, of godless latitudinarian ways of thinking; there were tales of wild courses in the wicked city that made hoary pows wag over the manner in which ministers have to be educated. But all that was definitely known was that a promising career had somehow been marred, that he who might have swayed Senates or made sinful congregations quake with the thunders of his denunciation, ruined his temper over ploughmen's brats; and that in spite of all that had

come and gone his upper lip was wondrously stiff and his lower habitually stuck out in disdain.

Certain of his old accomplishments remained with him. In his student days he had been an athlete and boxer, and from the time that Burnside first knew him his bacchanalian tastes were pronounced. The love of strong drink grew with years and crosses; but the tone of his muscle seemed to suffer no deterioration. On odd Saturday nights he had threshed half the blades in the parish, to the scandal of everybody and the admiration of not a few; the other half cheerily took his mastery on trust. His reputation in the most essential of all sciences brought him profound respect from the scholars, who emulated him so assiduously that it was said when a boy went to Burnside he went to the boxing school. Among the more thoughtful people Mr. Proudfoot's reputed scholarship, which included the ability to read books in divers strange tongues like A B C, induced a certain wonder not unmixed with awe.

"He kens more than the very meenister himsel," said some with bated breath. Had he deigned to notice the matter himself he would probably have remarked that all the minister had ever learned was but a fraction of what the dominie had forgotten. He was never guilty of the boast, however.

Much of his learning had indeed slipped from him because he found no use for it, but much also remained; and deep down in his indurated vagabond heart was a love of letters not matched in Logieburn parish, nor in many leagues outside of it. On Homer and the Greek dramatists he would wax eloquent to frenzy, fascinated and enraptured perhaps by the heathen licence, which to a thirsty man, contrasted so gratefully and finely with the contemptible abstemiousness of latter-day moralists.

"Glorious old Homer!" he would exclaim, in companies whose blissful ignorance made them wonder whether he were mad or merely tipsy. "Glorious old Homer! oh, thou sublime, blackguardly old bacchanal, touch thy servant's lips with the promethean fire. Lord! it's worth ten frosty religions."

Horace he would spout between gills to staring husbandmen, who whispered to each other that the fearful gibberish was original; and in audacious moments he wickedly made chaste ears burn with impromptu renderings of Ovid.

Virgil he described succinctly as a patchwork of imitations. "Stately?" he would cry, remembering the conventional note of praise. "Yes, stately and a milksop. I hate imitations. A copy of the devil himself would be as insipid as a painted angel or a prude's kiss. Without the blind rake of Chios there would have been little piping, though doubtless plenty of soft-soaping, from the parasite and flatterer of Augustus. Don't talk to me, please, about Tityrus." And the dumfounded rustics held their peace.

He loved to dispute too, to confound botching logicians out of the mouth of Aristotle, Berkeley, or Kant. When clowns were knocked senseless by terminologies that were as clubs in the hands of a giant, the vanquished would go home remarking that the dominie had had a bad fit that night, and hinting, if the whisky had taken effect, of the subterranean source of his erudition.

But professionally Peter Proudfoot did not shine. In ten years he had not sent a boy to college, and he seemed to have abandoned hope of ever sending one again. His scholars took to the plough-stilts, the hammer and chisel, the spade, the mattock, the hoe, and the shepherd's crook. He expended little labour upon them. Why should one set pearls before swine? A little reading, a little writing, some arithmetic, a spell of the Shorter Catechism, and a great deal of the black ruler, and the quaking dullards were thrust forth to consort with the animals they tended. Their teacher had no further interest in them.

But repeated conversations with Mr. Dudley, and his own knowledge of Evan's abilities, had stirred the master's aspirations afresh. As the school was dispersing on the opening day he suddenly gripped Evan by the arm, pulling him aside.

"They're going to make a scholar of you," he said, with a savage abruptness that made the boy shake. "Well, now, I know you. You like fighting: a bloody nose and a black eye are your favourite game; but I want to tell you now that if I catch you doubling your fists when you ought to be at your books, as sure's you're alive there'll be trouble."

He shook his black ruler, and Evan instinctively dodged.

"Come this way," continued the master, without noticing the movement; "I want to show you something." And he dragged Evan to the rickety desk that stood on three frail legs against the wall by the fireplace. Lifting the lid with



a feverish eagerness that both astonished and alarmed his companion, he drew forth a tattered book.

"It's a University Calendar," he explained, turning over the leaves nervously. "It was printed years before you were born, and there's not the name of a native of Logieburn parish in it. There, read that, read it out, man; I don't see too well."

And Evan read:

FACULTY OF ARTS.

HUMANITY.

Winter Session, 18—. *Senior Class.*

1. Peter Proudfoot (medal.)

Evan looked up in amazement.

"Your auld dominie, man," said Mr. Proudfoot in a voice that vibrated strangely; "your auld dominie. Now turn over the page. No, give me the book; I'll find the place. Here, here. Read that." And again Evan read:

GREEK.

Winter Session, 18—. *Senior Class.*

1. Peter Proudfoot (medal).

"Now," cried the excited dominie, taking another calendar from his desk, "here's something more. Lord! how old fingers shake. Here it is, here it is: you read it out. I see worse than ever."

And once more Evan read:

GRADUATES IN ARTS.

Honour Lists, 18—.

Classics: Class I.—Proudfoot, Peter.

"That'll do," said the dominie, "there's more, but that'll do. Shut the book. Man, Evan, ye've brought a queer feeling to my eyes. It sounds strange in this place, doesn't it? Well! never mind, facts are facts. But listen, I am going to tell you a secret: if you don't keep it between your teeth you'll rue it. The Rev. Murdoch Macnair was in all

these examinations, but you don't see his name. He had a scramble for a bare pass, and nearly missed even that; he's got a kirk to-day though. That's what folk call the irony of Fate; you'll understand it better by-and-by. But I hope you'll never know how hellishly ironical Fate can be. Her satire is a thing to wring the soul; pray to be delivered from it—pray for that as you value your temporal and eternal welfare. But I was going to tell you something else, and it is this, that I want to see your name in the calendar. You can put it there if you like. I never imagined they were going to send you to college; thought they'd make a plough-coulter of you like the rest. But it's come, Evan; we are—we are going to make a scholar of you."

His eyes shone and an inch seemed to have been all at once added to his stature.

"And when your name is there," he went on, "you'll avoid the road some of us have travelled. Tell your father I'm going to Aberfourie to-night for books. He'll pay when he's ready. We must get rid of that trash you have under your arm, and to-morrow we'll begin Cæsar. We'll manage the classics, I think; about the mathematics we'll see later on. When you're on a bit, my old books—some of them are left yet—will come in handy. Now be off and mind what I have said."

CHAPTER IV

THAT evening, as it happened, Neil Macgregor had likewise occasion to visit Aberfourie, and business or pleasure, or perhaps a little of both, detained him to a late hour. When, at last, after an ardent spell of sociality, there flashed upon him a wholesome remembrance of Lisspeth's erratic modes of displaying affection, he hurried out of the lights of the town, and into the lonely road, at the dog-trot natural to a belated husband yearning to reach the arms of the best wife in the world.

In a surprisingly short time he had reached Ceann Dhu, a desolate spot with an evil name, in a little dell or dip at the foot of a long black stretch of heath. In a hollow on the lower side of the highway was a fearsome pool, said to be



fathomless, known to be haunted, and at all times sickly with weeds and slime. In the wildest storm it was unruffled, in the severest frost unfrozen, and the boldest did not care to guess what hid in its unsounded depths, or lurked among its sedges and scum of green. A bowshot below this tarn, again, was a savage ravine, rent into frightful holes and jagged skeleton ribs of rock by a burn which readily became a roaring torrent. Above was the sullen uninhabited moorland, dotted, as Neil approached, with short, deceptive shadows, and away to the left he could plainly discern Duncairn kirkyard, with its dismantled church and slanting tombstones glinting eerily in the moonlight.

A man trudging alone under the starry sky thinks of strange things; and presently an uneasy apprehension began to nestle about Neil's vitals. He fought against it; told himself the crawling chills were absurd in a man of his mettle. But it was no matter for philosophy. In spite of his utmost reasoning, the ghostly glimmer of the kirkyard, the ebony gleam of the pool—a black eye in a dead landscape—the gaping, murky ravine, and the shadowy heath, illusively silvered by the new moon, remained horribly suggestive. Gruesome tales trooped upon his memory, tales of apparitions encountered at the spot by lonely wayfarers tramping even as he tramped now. An icy sensation ran through him, his hair stiffened, and his heart fluttered uncomfortably high in his breast. And as he made haste, thinking of spectres in ambush, all at once the solitude rang with the most unearthly screech that ever froze the currents of a man's being.

Neil drew up with a hard breath, every hair on his head on end, and waited for the thing to reveal itself. As he stood with the flesh creeping and shivering on his bones, there went up another long-drawn, piercing screech, that made his knees crook and smite each other in a violent palsy.

"Lord preserve me," muttered Neil, "keep me safe from the bogles!"

Steadying himself by a mighty effort, and hearkening with all his senses in his ears, he fancied he detected the semblance of a mad tune, such as may have enlivened the orgies of Kirk Alloway. By all that was holy, he had come slap upon a revel of fiends, ghosts, or witches; probably of all three.

Remembering the licence granted to spirits in the witch-



ing hour, Neil tried to read the time by his watch. Failing, he thrust the timepiece into his coat pocket among packets of nails, and in a tremor of racing shudders wondered what was going to happen.

Though courageous to the pitch of temerity when only creatures of flesh and blood were concerned, he was far too good a Highlander to presume on the supernatural. An ignorant man would instantly have turned tail and fled, trusting, in his folly, to escape by fleetness of foot. Neil knew better. If it was perilous to go forward it would be fatal madness to go back. So, breathing a prayer for protection from all ghosts and goblins, fiends and witches, he advanced with legs that shook as if they would bend under him, and eyes so far out of his head they saw both sides of the road at once. The sound, which had become continuous, rose and fell, now sinking to a dismal moan, again rising abruptly to a curdling yell, and in every change not merely maintaining but increasing its appalling, overwhelming suggestions of things spectral. Neil hoped the sprites might be too closely engaged to molest an inoffensive traveller; but he had not taken a dozen steps when the hope died, leaving him, as it were, naked to the bogles.

Tottering thus, in grave doubt whether he should ever again see Lisspeth or the light of day, he spied two figures sitting in the shadow of a bush by the roadside. He pulled up petrified and staring, like a man who has died in great agony of soul and body. He could neither move nor breathe. Had you offered him a thousand pounds in gold, the stricken hand could not have taken them. He was stone cold, numb both mentally and bodily; yet by some species of instinct he searched for horns and a cloven hoof, watched for blue flame, and almost sniffed for sulphur. Through it all he wondered what the Enemy of mankind would do with him.

Presently, as his terror abated somewhat, he realised that he was a doomed man if he hesitated; so setting his staff down with a temerarious click that brought a cold shock, he stumbled on once more. A terrific scream which made him jump heralded his advance; then all at once there was a crashing noise as of an orchestra gone mad, and Neil, not knowing what he did, broke into a run. As he came up one of the figures lowered a fiddle from its shoulder, and a flood of enlightenment came upon Neil.

"Lauchie Duff!" he cried in a thin shrill voice, "Lauchie Duff, and, sure's death, the dominie."

Mr. Duff looked up slowly, closed one eye, and hiccoughed.

"Ay," he said. "Ay, just so. And what for d'ye no skreigh it from a hilltap?"

He spoke as one entitled to resent an unbecoming mode of address. Nor was it without cause. Poacher, smuggler, spendthrift, ingrate, rake, and fiddler-in-general to the parish, he enjoyed privileges ludicrously inconsistent with his callings and character, bullying, miscalling, sponging, and plundering as by right divine. Few who knew him cared to risk a quarrel with Lauchie. For this there were two principal reasons. At harvest homes, weddings, and christenings his room might be preferable to his company, but his fiddle was indispensable. Just as surely as the musician smacked of the pit, his music suggested Paradise. With different ideals and a soberer love of strong drink Lauchie might have taken the gloss of Paganini's fame; ay, even off Neil Gow's. So good judges believed. As it was, drunken, dissolute, blear of eye and shaky of hand, he was a miracle of skill, an acknowledged prince among the crew of rustic fiddlers. There was scarce a farmhouse and not a single tavern within twenty miles in which his battered instrument had not wrung men's souls with grief or sent them wild with ecstacy. It was a question with some whether he could not make the angels in heaven weep or dance at his pleasure.

The second reason was yet weightier. By common repute the man was uncanny. It was notorious, for instance, how his enemies' haystacks were burned to the ground. At such happenings the Aberfourie constable grew apoplectic over fire-raisings, and furious talk of clapping incendiaries in irons; but Lauchie went his customary ways, and would even condescend to discuss the cause of spontaneous combustion in dried grasses with the baffled officer of the law. These things made the country-side tolerant, and disposed Neil in particular to be kind. He therefore laughed at Lauchie's insolence as an apposite jest.

"Skreigh?" he said. "Py George, I will nearly skreigh my wits out."

"Impossible," retorted Lauchie. "Quite impossible. Nae man can skreigh out what he hasna got in. Ye mauna be

vain. I canna stand vanity, no, nor vexation o' speerit neither."

"Fiddlers will pe aye jokers," remarked Neil pleasantly. "And what will Mr. Proodfoot pe doing here?" he inquired, bending towards the dominie.

"Doing?" repeated Lauchie. "I'll tell ye what he's been doing; he's been sittin' there spuein' Greek at me till am fair scunnered. I had to droon the crather's bletherin' wi' the fiddle."

"It is quite true," said Mr. Proodfoot, looking up for the first time and speaking with deep solemnity. "What this battered Apollo, this peripatetic scraper of catgut sayeth—is—gospel truth—anyway as true as anything he's ever likely to say—and it makes me sorrowful to think of it. You're Pitweem; sit down, we'll try and thole you."

"It will pe getting gey and late," returned Neil; "maybe we will better take the road."

"The wisdom of the observation is wonderful," said the dominie. "Wonderful! There is no doubt whatever about it. Time flies, and more than that, he writes wrinkles on thine azure brow. Ah! it's a sad thought. Nevertheless, *Æquam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem.* Be not disturbed. 'Tis the word of Horace."

"That's the way he's been goin' on a' night," put in Lauchie in a tone of disgust. "Just deavin' me wi' his nonsense o' Greek."

"He calleth it Greek," muttered the dominie, *"experto crede.* Pitweem, sit down; you hide the light of the moon. Place yourself by the side of this hoary-headed libeller of the ancients," nodding sideways at Lauchie. *"Arcades ambo,"* he chuckled sardonically when Neil obeyed. Then, bending forward in his old attitude, he began to shake his head lugubriously, and Neil noticed a parcel wrapped in brown paper slung from his neck.

"That will pe a gey and praw locket you haf, dominie," remarked Neil, stretching out his hand and twirling the thing.

"I tied that aboot his neck at the beginnin' o' the spree," explained Lauchie. "The dominie's memory's treecherous whiles. He says it's books."

"It is for Evan Kinloch, nephew of the ill-l-ustrious Pitweem," said Mr. Proudfoot, "and if the nephew has but the smallest touch of the uncle's brilliant—ay, faith, the transcendental imperviousness—much good it'll do him. I have



heard it said that brain is a rare possession, better than rubies, ay, and the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley into the bargain. *Animi cultus humanitatis cibus.* But that's a fib. Fat kye's the thing."

"Yes," responded Neil at random.

"*Emunctæ naris homo,*" said the dominie. "You'll get on in the world, Pitweem. You're a judge of turnips. It's getting damp and cold; help me up."

"I'll hae nae favouritism here," protested Lauchie emphatically. "If he helps you he helps me. I canna see that the pooer to dribble Greek like a leakin' barrel makes you perteecularly deservin' o' consideration. Gie's a hand, Pitweem."

"Soberness, righteousness, wisdom," observed Mr. Proudfoot as he staggered to his feet in the embrace of Neil. "These things are the grand essentials. There's Plato's authority for it."

"Ay," said Lauchie, stottering in his turn in Neil's obliging arms. "And who's this man Plato that's so fine at the preachin'? Does he dribble Greek too?"

"A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's vexation is heavier than them both," murmured the dominie. "I'm not sure," he said aloud, "but it runs in my head he was Nero's chief fiddler. You'll have heard of Nero, the chap that burned Rome for the fun of seeing a blaze. But mark the revenges of time: Rome's fiddling to-day and he's burning."

"I'd like to have played to him," said Lauchie, clutching at Neil. "He must hae been a roisterin' blade o' a man. But could he haud his feet wi' a wame fu' o' bad whisky? Pitweem, gie the dominie yer airm, we'll go home cleekin' just as thick as thieves."

And cleeking they went, Neil in the centre, and Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Duff hanging precariously to his arms.

It was a broad road they travelled, but to shorten it Lauchie gave them a ranting bacchanalian spring at intervals, with a running commentary on his own performance. Once he essayed to make them dance.

"I'll just gar ye loup like the frolicsome kid o' Scriptir, if ye've ever heard o't," he remarked, swaying wildly in the moonlight.

He put the fiddle to his shoulder, and there was an earsplitting screech.

"That's a fine skreigh frae a museecal instrument," he commented.

"Brain him, Pitweem," urged the dominie savagely. "Brain him. No court would convict. I'll stand by you."

"It was 'Home, Sweet Home,' that was in my head," explained Lauchie, "and the wife waitin' to dress doon the husband. Weel, thank God, am nae husband that I ken o'. There's nae perticular meal poke for me. It's just a peck at a neighbour's bin, dicht the neb and away. Never kent, never missed. Are ye no for dancin'?"

"Are you for assassination?" demanded the dominie, and the three linked again and went on.

It was not till the parting that Mr. Proudfoot made direct reference to his evening's mission.

"Evan's going to take the gold medal," he said. "It's all arranged as nicely as a tinker's wedding. We'll manage the classics by ourselves. It's a grand world; man does not live by bread alone, nor yet by fat kye. I could tell you astonishing things, Pitweem, if there was any hope they'd do you good."

"He's been tellin' me aboot it," observed Lauchie. "I couldna get him to speak o' anything but Greek and Hebrew trash and what the laddie Evan is going to do."

The dominie threw up his head with a snort and a sudden fiery gleam of the eye.

"The laddie Evan," he repeated. "The laddie Evan, ay, e'en the laddie Evan. Listen and I will tell you something. The laddie Evan is going to be and to do what would never enter your soaked head, you sodden, blinking, squinting, runkled, lobster-snouted whisky stoup."

"That's a thocht strong frae a freend," responded Lauchie, endeavouring to stand up straight.

"Friend!" cried the dominie. "Friend! Lord God, what has been my transgression that this carbuncled suck-the-spigot should call me friend? I declare before Heaven I would not spue you out of my mouth, Lauchie. Get out of my sight."

Feeling that one of the dominie's unaccountable storms was brewing, Neil prudently began to edge away.

"Well! the wife will pe waiting; I must pe off," he said, as cheerily as if his companions had just been exchanging compliments and terms of endearment.

"Lord sake dinna leave me," cried Lauchie, sobering



marvellously in his alarm. "Dinna leave me. He'll finish me if he begins. It would be fair murder to leave us thegither. Take me wi' ye, Pitweem."

"Hear the chittering lion roar," said the dominie. "But try and keep up that lump of jelly you call your heart. You're safe. Four things protect you—you're old, you're a fool, you're a fiddler, and you're drunk. Ugh! You turn my stomach! Take him with you, Pitweem: hide him out of sight—stick him in the barn, stuff him in the byre, put him to sleep with his brethren of the sty; and if he speaks of Evan or of learning, of Greek or Latin or Hebrew, or anything else his senseless tongue knows nothing about, ram a bottle of straw down his slanderous throat."

And turning he made off with unsteady strides, his parcel of books bumping against him as he swayed and lurched.

Lauchie watched him for a moment with an expression oddly compounded of gravity and resentment.

"The dominie's a big man when he's in liquor," said Mr. Duff presently. "And am no sayin' but he's a grand hand at Greek and stuff; but damme, I could fiddle him blin'—ay, and if it came to that, drink him blin' too. Much good his learnin' does him. Just look at him there birlin' and stacherin' like a bubblyjock in an eddy o' wind. Thank God ye can stand a glass or two, Pitweem."

"Yes," said Neil vaguely, for he was busily thinking what was to become of his nephew.

CHAPTER V

Of the many remarkable qualities of Mr. Proudfoot, not the least notable was his wondrous power of recovery from the effects of what his neighbours euphemistically called "the ball." On the morning after his *rencontre* with Neil and Lauchie he appeared in the schoolroom with the shining face of a cherub, and a manner which told the densest urchin present that something uncommon was in the wind. When, immediately after prayers, Evan was called up before the three-legged seat of authority, the babbling hum fell to a tense silence, and fifty pairs of eyes grew round with curi-

osity. What had Evan done? What was to be his punishment? There was a moment of breathless dramatic suspense as they waited for the master to speak. When he did, every chubby face tilted a little farther forward, every eye shone, and every mouth opened with a keener expectation.

"Draw a line behind you," said Mr. Proudfoot, having surveyed his pupil at least six times from head to foot. "Draw a line behind you. Nay, man, don't look as if your head were about to be struck off your shoulders. All I want you to do is to cut off the past. You have reached the cross-roads and are turning upon a new adventure. It will not be dallying with Amaryllis in the shade; lay your account for that." And the intent scholars wondered who Amaryllis might be. "No, nor yet gathering honey a long summer's day on Mount Hybla. It's the kind of quest that needs the stout heart for the stey brae. Possibly we may reach El Dorado; possibly return with the Golden Fleece." —(Has the master been drinking again? reflected the intelligent scholars.)—"At any rate, we set forth now in the spirit of Alexander to conquer new realms. Here are our guides for the first stages of the journey. Take them, and see you make good use of them."

Evan returned to his place hot and crimson, and Babel broke out. But the scholars' minds were more on Evan than on the lessons. In the play-hour the hero was the centre of an excited crowd jostling to learn his plans and catch a sight of the magical books. It was noted by the favoured few who were permitted to handle and examine the volumes that only bits of them were in English, the rest being in strange languages that none could make out; and infinite was the wonder why Evan, a boy just like any other boy, should have been singled out for honour. The truth that one shall be taken and another left had not yet found a place in their philosophy. They were occupied with other questions.

"I suppose you'll stop fechtin' now," remarked Dan Thompson, with just a suspicion of contempt in his tone.

Dan held the onerous office of pugilistic whip. He it was who arranged all fights, conveyed challenges and counter-challenges from boy to boy, selected the hour and field of battle, and in general managed the practical side of the Educational Course. "Three good fights a day" made his ideal minimum. With the dominie lax and the boys in trim he



often doubled, sometimes even quadrupled, that number, and Evan had always been one of his surest men. Now Evan was exhibiting a weakness for other things. So it was with a feeling of dissatisfaction amounting almost to disgust that Dan said, "I suppose you'll stop fechtin'."

"I suppose so," answered Evan carelessly; and Dan had to walk away in order to hide his feelings.

That day there was not so much as a single fight, for Dan was both vexed and dispirited. Counsel with his fellows, however, restored him sufficiently to make him think of argument. In the evening he would convoy the renegade part of the way home and endeavour to save him from disastrous absurdities. But when the time of dispersal arrived, Evan remained with Mr. Proudfoot, and Dan went off in a burning indignation to plot conspiracies.

Two hours later, Evan stepped into the dusk, glowing with enthusiasm and thinking of Dan as little as of the North Pole. The glories of the ring had paled and completely vanished before the dazzling, the thrilling brightness which had suddenly burst upon his vision. Some magical power, subtle and secret in its processes, had endowed him with a pair of new eyes and poured a new tide into his veins. He saw thrones of gold and ivory waiting for an occupant, kingdoms inviting to be conquered, whole fairy realms beckoning for a ruler, and with a bounding spirit he felt himself vaulting into the saddle and riding forth to victory and laurels. Never knight-errant had a more puissant right arm or a heart that rose more gallantly above obstacles. It was perhaps an additional incentive that the way was in parts dark, the mode of conquest vague. The man and the moment would clear all that. Whatever the dominie had said, whatever necromancy he had used to prick ambition and kindle imagination, the pupil would not that evening have exchanged prospects with the proudest king in Europe, Asia, or Africa.

Reaching home he bounded in upon Jessie with an excitement that speedily proved infectious, and throwing his old books on the table exhibited the new as treasures upon which she might gaze if she chose, but durst not handle. None the less she handled them—snatching them brazenly from his grip, indeed—and leaned over and praised them, and indulged in predictions that sent the light head of her brother yet higher among the stars.

David's joy, when in due course the volumes were submitted to his inspection, was soberer and probably deeper. He treated them very gently, turning them over and over, and closely examining the binding as if exteriors were the main things in school books. He seemed timid to venture upon the inside: what was embalmed there was out of his province, above his head, like the incomprehensible things of the heavens, and when at last he came to it he turned the leaves with a sort of tender reverence, as if each leaf were a sheet of priceless gold. And through it all his looks were much more eloquent than his words.

"I hope they will be a blessing to you, Evan," he said in Gaelic. "We must pay Mr. Proudfoot for them at once." That was all the full heart could say.

But a little later when the nightly petition went up there was a special appeal of moving power and unction that the new venture might prosper if it were the will of the All-Wise.

It did prosper; it prospered beyond hope or expectation. For three hours daily—one hour before school and two hours after it—Peter Proudfoot and his pupil were closeted together and worked with the zest that comes of a living interest.

The master was astonished by the ease with which the boy learned and by the quickness and retentiveness of his memory; he was astonished also, as Mr. Dudley had been, by the imaginative insight, the intuition it might fairly be called, which enabled the learner to bound to results usually reached by painful and tedious processes. But most of all was he astonished by the impression of reserve power which Evan gave.

"He is like an engine of unlimited capacity," the delighted dominie would exclaim. "Ordinary tests are no use. An ounce or a ton, it's all the same. Amazing! perfectly amazing! Let him but keep this up, and no tether will bind or hold him." The enraptured master thought of the young Pascal rediscovering the sciences and creating a Euclid for himself.

The brightest qualities have their defects. As the course of instruction proceeded Mr. Proudfoot noted with some misgiving a touch of intellectual hauteur in his scholar that might prove troublesome, nay, might easily become dangerous. The hardihood of mind which Evan was not slow to

evince even in the presence of superiors might, if not carefully watched and guarded, develop into ruinous stubbornness.

"He could be thrawn," said the master to David Kinloch one day, "ay, sir, as thrawn as the devil himself. You may lead him, but you'll never drive him, and if it came to that I shouldn't like to be the one to try. He needs judicious management."

"See that he gets it, Mr. Proudfoot," answered David anxiously. "What use is learning with wilful pride of heart?"

"Oh, not quite so serious, David," rejoined the dominie, "not quite so serious. It's just a bit of dour spunk that needs guiding. Leave him to me."

Mr. Proudfoot would forgive much to such ability and such energy.

The elementary class-books were mastered and thrown aside before it seemed they had been well begun, and Evan cantered out of Cæsar to take Virgil at the charge.

"He's wonderful," the dominie would repeat. "Now, though I have taken my bits of honours in the classics myself, I forget things; but he never forgets anything. Swiftness and exactness combined—I never knew the like of it, never—and, mind, I know something of students."

These things were said in private; but one day his words received a public confirmation that tickled him to a diabolical fit of secret glee. The Rev. Robert Whittock and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair had heard some fables of Evan's abilities from his patron Dr. Forbes, and, like 'cute birds well able to distinguish chaff from corn, they shook their heads and smiled. But they would look into matters for themselves; and accordingly on the first favourable occasion the Rev. Robert Whittock took Evan and the Latin grammar in hand with some ostentation. It was plain sailing on both sides for a little; then the examiner, smirking to himself, put a poser from memory. Evan answered promptly.

"You're wrong," said the Rev. Robert; "try again."

Without hesitation Evan repeated his answer.

"Have I not just told you that is wrong?" said Mr. Whittock, cocking his head to enjoy the triumph. "Are you of the strange people who think a wrong can be made right by merely repeating it?"

Evan flushed over cheek and brow as if suddenly stung;

but he looked into the great man's face steadily and without the least abashment, while the whole school held its breath.

"Well! are you going to try again?" inquired the Rev. Robert, glancing comprehensively at the audience.

"No, sir," came the reply, firm, clear, and though low and respectful, resonant as a cannon-shot.

"And why not, sir, why not?" cried Mr. Whittock, flushing in his turn. "Why not, sir? This is pretty discipline," casting a look of rebuke at Mr. Proudfoot. "You are wrong and won't try to be right. I ask you why?"

"Because if I'm wrong, sir," said Evan, quietly, "the book is wrong." And if a bomb had crashed into the room the consternation could not have been greater.

"God, I didn't know where I was standing when I heard the laddie," said the dominie, sitting beside the Rev. Murdoch Macnair at Neil's tea-table that evening, "The only thing that saved me was that he was right. But think of the nerve of him. What'll he be when he's through college if he's like this at a wee elementary school? But I'm thinking he need never ask a favour of the minister of the parish."

The Rev. Murdoch could not help a subdued chuckle over his rival's discomfiture; but he said with an air of Olympian impartiality that of course boys were not to be encouraged in pertness.

"That's as wise as a saying of Solomon," responded the dominie. "But I've heard the Free Kirk minister say that truth is priceless. I'm thinking Evan will do. He seems to be one of those who will speak the truth though the deil be shamed."

Mr. Macnair inclined his head as if to say he certainly would not think of impugning the teachings of the Free Kirk minister.

"And what's he going to be?" he asked, slicing a roll of fresh butter that was still sweet with the fragrance of the churn. David, who had been invited in honour of his son's performance, replied that, if it were God's will, Evan would follow in the footsteps of his revered minister.

"There's no doubt the Church needs labourers both at home and abroad," observed Mr. Macnair. "But I thought I heard something about his being a doctor. Mrs. Macgregor," bowing gallantly to the perspiring hostess, "I really don't think that in the whole course of my life I ever tasted such scone and butter."

"Oh, yes whatever," put in Neil joyously, "the wife will pe the lass for the butter and scones. You just leave her alone for that."

"They are delicious," said Mr. Macnair with emphasis.

"Thenk ye, sir," responded Mrs. Macgregor, perspiring more than ever. "And will you just pe helping yourself? Inteet, I will often and often haf petter things. You will not pe eating at all, sir. You fair shame me. And Mr. Proodfoot, will you pe taking something? A little jeel or maype more cream in your tea. Cream's plentiful; the grass is gey and good this year too. Just pe making yourself at home now."

Perturbation and a beaded trickling moisture gave a troubled look and great redness to Mrs. Macgregor's countenance. Several times she wiped it desperately, loosening strands of hair, which clung in sweaty ringlets to the fat hanging expanse of her cheeks, and remarked between times that the weather had got "extraornar" hot. Mr. Macnair came delicately to her relief.

"I cannot conceive how you make them," he observed, examining the quarter of a scone scientifically, "so light, so white, so toothsome! Do you use butter?"

"Oh no, sir," Mrs. Macgregor made haste to answer, "it will just pe the soor puttermilk. There will pe nothing for paking like the soor buttermilk."

"Sour buttermilk," put in Mr. Proudfoot, "is good for many things."

He intended to say that for sobering a drunk man it is an almost unfailing specific; but suddenly changing the current of his ideas he added weakly that it is excellent for removing freckles. Mrs. Macgregor stated in confirmation that for restoring the complexion after sunburn its efficacy is unquestionable.

"But it is only young lasses that will think of the like of that," she concluded, smiling uneasily. "What need a poor old cailleach like me care?"

"They say the queenly Helen could never forget her face," remarked the dominie. "At what age think you, Mrs. Macgregor, does vanity die in the sex?"

"Inteet, sir, I never heard," returned Mrs. Macgregor jocosely, and the little sally quite restored her.

"The heart is more than the face," said the Rev. Murdoch Macnair sententiously. "David, may I trouble you for



the cheese? It looks as tempting as the butter. Scone a day old, a layer of fresh butter, a slice of cream cheese—these Mrs. Macgregor," smiling unctuously on the lady, "are among the most savoursome things of life. We were discussing your boy, David, and I was going to say," he went on, thinking of the only natural and eligible successor to Dr. Forbes, "that I cannot imagine a more glorious career for a young man of energy and talent with a calling than the foreign missionary field."

"Yes," interpolated Neil with conviction. "It will pe a grand thing to convert the heathen. Where will you advise him to go, sir?"

"Oh," rejoined Mr. Macnair comprehensively, "there's a teeming population in India waiting for the light, and in Africa, and the islands of the far South."

"Among the cannipals," said Neil. "Gosh, they might take it into their heads to eat him, sir. I wass reading a paper the other day where a parcel of plack rascals ate their meenister—picked his pones as clean as a sheepshank—am sure I hope he disagreet with them, only I will haf a notion what you would call a clean strae death is petter. Do you not think, sir, there will pe plenty of sinners at home for Evan to try his hand on?"

"It matters not, Mr. Macgregor," replied the minister, "how or where we die if we die in His cause and for His glory."

"To pe shure you will know pest apoot them things, sir," said Neil, "and my word iss not fit to stand peside yours. Though what I am thinking iss this, that if the plack hungry teffles—I didna mean that, sir," explained Neil apologetically; "it wass a clean slip of the tongue. If thae plack rascals eat you, skin and pone as you might say, you canna pe perried like other decent folk; and, though it iss a kittle thing to ask, sir, might there not just pe the posseebility of a mistake when the pig trump plows?"

"These are matters on which it does not become us to be too curious," returned Mr. Macnair authoritatively.

"Do not speak apoot eating folk, Neil," said Lisspeth, with a look of admonition. "It will pe enough to give a pody a turn to think of it."

"To be shure," said Neil, genially. And the conversation veered to crops, cattle, fat and lean soils, current prices of farm produce, and other matters of moment to the practical mind.

Mr. Proudfoot alone remained in a state of preoccupation and detachment, thinking of Evan and the Rev. Robert Whittock. Once he chuckled so irrelevantly in the midst of a discussion on the best method of rearing calves that Neil, interrupted in a clinching argument, was moved to inquire the cause of such untimely jollity.

"Nothing in the world but my own poor thoughts," answered the dominie, "and the fun of the Latin grammar."

"It was a sore blunder on the part of our friend," observed Mr. Macnair sweetly.

"Yes," said the dominie, shaking with suppressed merriment. "An unco sore mistake. Next time he'll perhaps remember the daft Dane's judicious hint about speaking by the card."

CHAPTER VI

PRESENTLY Mr. Macnair and David left, but Mr. Proudfoot tarried to enjoy a little friendly intercourse with Neil. The talk, as might be expected, was copious, eloquent, genial, and as happens when mind and tongue are socially inspired and tuned, unlimited in range. Beginning familiarly with such everyday topics as prize stock and ploughing matches, it ascended to the highest themes of morals, polity, and religion; and there was weighty if urbane debate. At ten o'clock the two were arguing, with uplifted forefingers and faces of momentous gravity, Protagora's old question, "whether there were gods or whether not;" and Lisspeth, growing sleepy, thoughtfully relieved them of a trammelling presence by retiring to bed.

At that they settled down properly to the rigours of the game. They drew their chairs closer together, they clicked their glasses without fear of rebuke, they leaned their elbows on the table and ducked fraternally to each other, they descanted upon one another's virtues in terms that came dangerously near flattery. Then one plumed his wings for a flight in the empyrean, while the other nodded in wonder and admiration. At half-past ten the dominie soared out of Neil's ken in a disquisition upon the Nikomachean Ethics, with special reference to the author's remarks on modera-



tion, and a eulogy on the Homeric gods for their superb scorn of the conventional and the commonplace. Neil was getting drowsy, in spite of his admiration, when the dominie came gaily circling down again in a Hudibrastic satire on the parish minister's latinity, and in pure mellowness of soul broke into song. Joyously pulling himself together, Neil proceeded to give proof of his geniality by swinging his head in tune and beating time with his foot.

"'Within an hour o' Edinburgh toon.
A mile afore the su—u—n gaed do—o—n,
A lassie wi— a la—a—ssie wi—i—wi—i——'"

"It's no worth while," said the singer, stopping abruptly and looking at Neil with extreme seriousness.

"It's no worth while," assented Neil, returning the solemn look. "Am perfeckly with you. No worth while."

So they applied themselves with quickened zest to a solace at once sweeter and more easily compassed.

Towards the witching hour Mr. Proudfoot rose to go, and Neil gave him a friendly arm till he should be off the premises. In the yard Neil found the visitor less steady than was desirable.

"Ye will pe stacherin' a wee pittie, dominie," he said softly.

"Ay," returned the dominie, "I haven't got my sea-legs yet," and thereupon he began to sing:

"'Drunk again and lost my doggie,
Hoo the deuce will I win hame?'"

"Whisht," said Neil in alarm, for he desired dead secresy. "Whisht. Gosh pless me, they will hear us."

"Just whisht yersel'," answered Mr. Proudfoot in an offended tone. "What for should I no comfort myself wi' a bit sang? Tell me that, tousy-head. Ay, faith, I'll sing," and before Neil could do aught to prevent him he had broken out again:

"'Hie upon Highlands, and low upon Tay,
Bonnie George Campbell rade out on a day,
Saddled and bridled and booted gaed he,
Hame came his gude horse, but never came he.'"

"Ay, indeed, it was a sair fecht. Pitweem, for a' yer sins I like ye, and I'm going to give ye another wee liltie."

"As sure as death they'll hear us," protested Neil.

"And what of that?" answered the dominie. "It'll do their besotted souls good. Whoso hath not music in his soul is fit—is fit—is fit for a heap o' things that shall be nameless. The divine—diabolic William says it.

"'O what a parish, what a terrible parish,
O what a parish is little Dunkel';
They hae hangit the minister, drounded the precentor,
Dung doun the steeple and drucken the bell.
Through the steeple was doun, the kirk was still stan'in,
They biggit a lum where the bell used to hang.
A still-pat they gat and they brewed Hielan' whisky,
On Sundays they drank it and rantit and sang.'

"A graceless, godless set," commented the dominie. "Man, Pitweem, I wish ye wid keep yer yard in smoother order," he added testily. "It's just a hatter o' nobs and holes that's neither canny nor yet fit for Christian feet."

Neil began to perceive that Mr. Proudfoot would have difficulty in getting home, and the knowledge troubled him. Running his eye round the moonlit yard he spied a barrow, and a happy thought struck him.

"Now you just stand there," he said, backing the dominie against a gable-wall. "That will keep you up. There, steady."

"What, if I may ask, are ye going to do wi' me?" inquired the dominie thickly.

"Going to get a gig for you," answered Neil. "Lean against the wall, propped like—there. I'll not pe half a minute, ay, or a minute neither."

"I'll not pe half a minute, ay, or a minute neither," repeated the dominie as he watched Neil's movements. "It's a strange way o' misusin' the Queen's English. A hunner pawmies wi' a' a man's might would not meet the case. That gig's for muckin' the byre," he said, when Neil returned with the wheelbarrow.

"We will put straw in it," said Neil.

"And then," returned the dominie, giving a lurch, "it is no doubt your pious intention to deposit me in it. I protest; I do. Since Silenus bestrode his ass there has never been such an indignity (hic) put upon learning."

But Neil did not hear for he had gone in quest of straw.

"This is what comes of good nature," observed the dominie, setting his back defiantly against the wall. "I hu-

moured him, the frowzy-headed son of Beelzebub, sat wi' him and tholed his silly clash, and all I'm fit for is to prop a gable-end. It's God's truth."

The soliloquy was interrupted by Neil, who returned very straight and sedate carrying an armful of straw which he proceeded with much ado to spread in the bottom of the barrow. That done he turned to his friend.

"Now, dominie," he said, throwing his arms lovingly about the man of learning. The two wrestled for a moment; then they fell together into the barrow, but Neil was uppermost. Extricating and raising himself with immense difficulty, he pulled and tugged Mr. Proudfoot into position.

"There, keep your feet over the shafts," he said, breathing hard. "That's it. There now, steady." Spitting on his palms and rubbing them together, he seized the handles of the barrow, and the next moment was trundling off with his load.

"Invention is the mother of necessity," muttered Mr. Proudfoot. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and the legs of the lame hang loose," he continued. "You're not so bad a cuddy, Pitweem, but what earthly reason you have for going zigzag in a straight course is more than I can persheave. Honest. A sober beast would give over measuring the road crossways. I am pained to think you maun be fou."

Neil snickered merrily at the idea.

"Fou?" he responded. "Fou? Fuich, fuich, dominie. If you saw me right fou, man, I will frighten the very auld ane himsel'."

"He's ill to scare they say," remarked Mr. Proudfoot.—"God sake! what's that?' 'he cried quickly, sitting bolt upright and staring into the gloom of a fir plantation.

"Eh," said Neil, pulling up, "what are you speaking that way for?"

"I thought I saw a red eye glowering at me," answered the dominie.

"This is just the kind of a night *he* will pe out," said Neil in an awed whisper. "Many's the time my mother that iss in glory said that. What sort of an eye was it, dominie?"

"A burning red eye," said the dominie. "It looked as if forked tongues of fire might leap out and strike you. God, a fearsome thing."

"That will pe it exackly," said Neil, quaking coldly in all his fibres. "The Lord haf pity and mercy too on poor mortals. You tell me a burning red eye. As shure as death that iss just it. Will you haf a pittie of a prayer handy, dominie?"

"No," replied the dominie, "I haven't a bit about me. Drive on; there's nothing to be seen now."

"Am glad of that," said Neil, proceeding on his way.

"Wammlin' waur than ever," commented the dominie. "Man, you and the minister of the parish would be a fine yokin'," and forgetting the red eye, he lay back and laughed an uproarious laugh that ended in a violent fit of hiccoughing.

Looking up presently with an expression of profound solemnity he pointed a forefinger at the staggering Neil.

"Pitweem," he said, impressively, "confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like an eye-tooth out of joint. I wonder if Solomon, the son of Jesse, was hurled home in a dirty wheel-barrow by his trusted friend when he found that out?"

"Solomon, the son of Jesse!" cried Neil, laughing outright, "oh, dominie, dominie! I will not pe praising myself, but I know my Pible petter than that. Solomon, the father of David, you mean."

The dominie nodded gravely.

"Ay, Solomon, the brother of David," he said. "The wisest man the world e'er saw, he dearly loved the lasses, O. A sair handlin' was that same Solomon, and a gallant gentleman to boot, never a gallanter; took great grief at the thought of any bonnie lassie dying an old maid. But, Pitweem, this is not fair, not fair at all. You must have a quadruple dose of original sin to clap me in this kind of conveyance: I might as well be sitting on your midden; and my best breeks on, too. Think of that—my very best pair of breeks that I paid old jag-my-thumb in Aberfourie my good seventeen-and-six for, with never a farthing back for drink or luck-penny. But Saints, as the observant Hooker has it, have a double portion of miseries to bear in this world. I know it (hic) from pershonal expeerensh."

"And what will Hooper pe?" asked Neil unsteadily.

"A man, God bless him!" said the dominie, "who was afflicted even ash we are: had a scold for a wife, a clapper tongue wad deave a miller, and rocked the cradle wi' his

toe when he was asked. A model husband and father. A satirical dog, too, as ever put the Catholic King's English to tree-s-an-ous uses. He wrote nine and thirty articles proving that the Church of England is the only true and original and authorised Apostolic Kirk ever founded upon earth. What d'ye think of that?"

Neil drew up suddenly, paused for a second, then dumped the barrow down so violently that the dominie, in his own words, not only bit his tongue, but was nearly shaken out of his bones.

"What iss that my ears will pe hearing?" demanded Neil sternly. "That man Crooker will have the tam foolishness in the blood of him. The Kirk of England! tam sheep's plethers. The Free Kirk of Scotland is my Kirk. No new-fangled Sassenach hotchpotch here. If the Apostle Paul wass living this fery day he will pe a Free Kirk man. The way he made the wild peasts jump at Jerusalem shows that."

"Assur-ed-ly," hiccoughed the dominie from the depths of the vehicle. "The reasoning's not to be got over."

"And what for will this man Cooper not mind what he will pe saying then?" asked Neil.

"Because he flourished in the days of darkness and knew no better," explained the dominie. "It's in my mind the Free Kirk was not invented in his time."

"Ah!" exclaimed Neil, generously relenting, "that will put the rick-ma-tick round apout the other way. The poor man will pe aneath the grey stone then. Ah! that iss a peety and not a blame at all."

He took up his barrow and trundled on again meditatively. For awhile there was silence; then the dominie said softly:

"What about my breeks, Pitweem? They'll never be fit for decent respectable legs again. It was an ill-done trick o' ye. If ye werena what ye are ye'd owe me a new pair. But a' things considered there's no cause to greet. How many pairs of breeks would the Rev. Bob give that he had just let that Latin grammar alone?

"'The minister kissed the fiddler's wife,
And couldna preach for thinkin' o't.'

"Fiddler's wives and Latin grammars are kittle things. And the fool spake out of the fulness of his folly, and the

silly bairn put its fingers in the fire. Did ye see his face when the thing happened? It was worth the price of ten pairs of the best breeks that ever covered hurdies just to see it."

And breaking into a fit of merriment Mr. Proudfoot rocked to and fro, till Neil had to call upon him to desist.

"I never thocht ye were so fou," returned the dominie. "If ye dinna mind ye'll hae me cowpit. The minister of the parish came a cropper this morning. Man, it was perfectly glorious." And again he shook with glee.

"If you will not sit quiet, dominie," said Neil, struggling grimly to steady himself and his barrow, "as shure's you're there I'll cowp you."

Almost as he spoke the barrow swayed erratically, describing a semicircle, and before either Mr. Macgregor or Mr. Proudfoot could realise the course of events, they were embracing in the ditch.

"I told you, Pitweem," gasped the dominie, "I told you you were owre fou."

Looking up at the reeling stars, Neil asked tartly which was fouest.

"This is no time for feckless questions," retorted the dominie. "I'll be obleeged to ye to take that dirt out of my mouth. 'Tis matter in the wrong place."

CHAPTER VII

THE temptation to celebrate the discomfiture of the Rev. Robert Whittock was too strong to be resisted; but as time passed the spirit of conviviality which had so long ruled the dominie's life was indulged less and less frequently, and, it was suspected, with a diminishing heartiness of enjoyment. Indeed, among cronies who suffered from perennial thirst, and had therefore the strongest motive to discountenance apostate, Band-of-Hope follies, his backsliding was first a cause of grief, and then, as it became hopeless, of secret mockery. No man cared to mock in public, because the dominie's tongue seemed to get a keener and keener edge as his principles deteriorated, and the boldest shrank from



risking its pitiless satire or explosive bursts of invective; so that the sneering and sniggering had to be done wholly behind back. Doubtless they gained in pungency what they lost by privacy.

Occasional turnings aside there were, of course; for a man of jovial reputation may not meet established friends by a convenient alehouse of a Saturday night and ignore auld lang syne. But these lapses into ancient custom merely served to accentuate the master's abstinence, and they did not at all hinder in the quest for knowledge that was astonishing the whole country-side. It was remarked by the observant that if the teacher was doing much for the pupil, the pupil was doing still more for the teacher.

"Clean reforming him," said Red Sandy, expressing the general sentiment in a word. "The next thing ye'll see will be the dominie taking the boards against whisky; then, I suppose, stellars* will go to the poorhouse."

And to be sure the dominie found meat and drink, solace and stimulation in the aptitude and willingness of his favourite scholar. Evan needed no spur, for he was ambitious to excel, and could toil amazingly when his interest was roused; and the dominie, foreseeing scholastic victories, permitted himself to dream of past friends, past rivals perhaps, mentioning his name once more with respect and admiration when Evan, his little Evan, should astonish professors and examiners.

"Cheer up, there's something to live for now," he said one evening to his aged mother, who was housekeeper, guardian, and sole domestic companion in one. "It makes the pulses beat with new life to have something with brains to teach."

And that night the poor decrepit, heavy-laden mother, whose heart had stood so many strains and shocks, thanked God on bended knee and with tears of gratitude for this saving mercy.

"If the scholars were all like Evan," she said to David some days later, "so much of Peter's money would not have gone to the public-house. The Lord does not always bestow a blessing when He gives a son. But ye'll be prood o' Evan, and ye hev cause, for he's a clever laddie, ay, and what is mair, a good laddie. I was ance prood o' my son too. There wasna a quicker learner at the school, no, nor

* Distillers.



at the college either, than my Peter. But—weel! it whiles does an auld mither's heart no good to go back on things. The past's gone beyond bringing back, and it becomes us to be gratefu' for the present. Peter's fair ta'en wi' Evan, and it's like auld times when learning was as a spring sun, rich wi' promise of harvest."

"I am glad to hear you speak the words, Mrs. Proudfoot," said David, in a tremulous voice.

"I am sure o' that, David," rejoined Mrs. Proudfoot, "quite sure o' that. And I'm glad for your sake. We've baith kent trial, but there's One that minds a' that. When you and me's gane, happit aneath the daisies, it's hard to say what Evan may be. Peter tells me he may be anything he likes. But if I was you I would watch owre him at college. That's the tryin' time. No every ane that opens the door can walk the furnace and no be burnt. Take a mither's word for it, Greek and Latin's no everything. No, no."

And following his wont in times of disquietude, David lay awake in the hours of sleep to brood upon the dangers that beset youth in great cities. Being a Highlander to his heart's core, and plentifully dowered with the gloom of the Celtic imagination, he found it the easiest thing in the world to call up harrowing visions of the Inferno. He saw temptations thronging to seduce unwary feet; he pictured protean sin in her thousand flaunting, flaming shapes, decoying innocence, laughing wisdom out of countenance, and tripping with her duped victim to the gulf. A moment of delirious excitement, a moment of giddy whirling and spinning on waters that crisped and glanced and curled and beckoned in dancing merriment; then suddenly wild crests and vortices roaring for prey. The lurid surge, rising and catching the cockle-shell of pleasure, sent it like a ball from a rocket clean upon the open lip of the maëlstrom. In an instant it was sucked in and engulfed, and a soul went headlong and irrevocably into the nether depths. Such was David's picture, and, shivering in his warm bed, he murmured fearfully, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Lose his own soul! Ay, there was the racking thought, the tremendous, the unspeakable risk.

But, returning to his rock of refuge, he remembered that One rules in the lightning and the hurricane, in the riot and tumult of Babylon, and the flaring palaces of wickedness,

...while Mr. Proudfoot and his
sustained glow of fore-ordained conq
seldom separate. If they were not in
declining, construing, or hunting pl
were on the hillside or in odorous wo
ing the spirit and style of their autho
couraged Evan to express himself fre
tioning him to take care he had som
speaking. Thus the process of brai
Evan was delighted by the lucid expos
taries, the illuminative and penetratin
tutor; and the tutor was ever more and
the clear faculties and rapid intelligence

"He just leaps to a new fact like a
dominie would exclaim, "and what h
Where he's going to end I'm almost a

The course of study did not always
Thompson, who had genius in his vocati
challenges upon the student. Sometim
sometimes declined them, but these cha
not satisfy Dan: he must contrive som
day he came to Evan with an important
from three picked men. Evan considere

"It's a pity," he said, quietly. "I h
Greek exercise for the master at once."

"It's a fine thing to have a Greek ex
afraid," returned Dan.

"If you say that again you may add y
rejoined Evan. "You're old and ..."



"Are they all to be taken at once?" asked Evan, surveying them.

"That is for you to decide," smirked Dan. "They are ready."

In a twinkling, Evan, minus jacket and bonnet, had planted himself in the proper attitude, face to face with the biggest boy, who was his senior by two years. A minute later Dan's champion was led away with a flowing nose, and Evan, just warming agreeably to his work, passed to the next: for him a loosened tooth and split lip were glory enough; and the third, impressed, no doubt, by the folly of fighting with Fate, mounted the white feather in the first round. Then the victor turned to Dan with flashing eyes and compressed lips.

"You have been bothering me a good deal, Dan, when I was busy with other things," he said. "Stand out, that we may settle matters."

Dan smiled inanely.

"If you are afraid," said Evan, "I will put on my coat."

A fighting reputation is not to be wantonly sacrificed, and Dan clearly recognised how much was at stake.

Throwing off his coat he squared up gallantly, though Evan, alertly on guard, noticed that the expression of the eye belied the confidence of the manner. Dan drove in, sparring furiously, and Evan, stepping nimbly aside, got in a stunning right-hander on the jaw while his opponent hit the air. Dan repeated his tactics and got it on the other jaw.

"Ow!" he roared, spitting blood. "I'll tear you to bits."

He sprang forward intending to close, and reeled from a straight shoulder blow in the right eye. Before he could recover his mouth was badly damaged.

"Boo!" he cried, clapping both hands to his face. Then suddenly taking a race he aimed a kick at Evan; but before the heavy boot-toe could effect his purpose he was sprawling on the ground with his antagonist above him.

"I have a good mind to break some bones for yon," said the victor, pounding the back of the other's head. "There now, lie quiet, or as sure's you're alive I will. Are you licked?"

"You'll see that when I get up," answered Dan, struggling fiercely.

"I'll see before you get up," said Evan, making his

knuckles play about the oozing mouth of Dan. "The sooner you say you're licked the sooner you're free to get up." And the intimation being accompanied by a kind of argument which was wholly irresistible under the circumstances, Dan mumbled an admission of defeat.

"Well, mind this," said Evan, releasing him. "When you or your friends want more you have only to let me know."

Then snatching up his belongings he made for the burn to wash off the marks of the fray and rearrange his toilet. The means at his command being rude his success was but partial. He was hardly surprised, therefore, when on resuming his studies the master eyed him sharply with the remark, "You have been fighting, sir."

"I couldn't help it, sir," explained Evan.

"Couldn't help it, you spitfire, what do you mean?"

Evan briefly related the conditions under which the battle was fought, extenuating nothing, nor setting down aught in malice.

"And did you dress down the lot?" inquired the master.

"Yes, sir," answered the conqueror bashfully, as if admitting an offence of which he were ashamed.

Mr. Proudfoot turned abruptly to look out of the window, his face twitching with a comical expression.

"I think I told you," he said, suddenly wheeling back upon the culprit, and speaking with the emphasis and solemnity essential to the occasion, "I think I told you what would happen if I caught you fighting."

Evan's eyes frankly owned the warning.

"Well, if ever I catch you disobeying again, there'll be a reckoning that you'll remember. Now let me see that Greek exercise."

In the meantime, Dan and his friends having taken counsel together, unanimously cast the defaulter outside the pale of comradeship. If he wanted Greek and Latin let him have Greek and Latin, and strut with the conceit of a peacock, and swell till his skin couldn't hold him. They were done with him finally and for ever. So he was allowed to go his own absurd way, or rather Mr. Proudfoot's absurd way, without further let or hindrance.

Three years the oddly-assorted pair worked together, learning and discoursing hugely, and taking in many things which did not lie in the direct path. Before the



opening of the fourth year there was a great conference in Neil's best room, at which the Master, David, Neil, Mrs. Macgregor, Jessie, and by chance Red Sandy were present. The subject of deliberation was Evan, his progress and prospects.

"He's done better than any one of us dared to expect," said the dominie, who had most of the talk to himself, "though I jaloused from the first what was in him. There's a long way to travel yet, however, and we musn't brag. When we're on the top we'll give a skelloch to relieve ourselves. Meantime, we keep toiling up the brae. And what I propose is this. My old pupil, Andrew Sinclair, is, as you know, head master of Aberfourie Academy. He's a prizeman in mathematics—took all that Glasgow had to give in that line. He and Evan are the only two scholars I have put through my hands in twenty years."

David drew a long breath, and Jessie scarce dared to wink lest she should lose a word.

"Now," continued Mr. Proudfoot, "I want Evan to leave me. I know something of the classics, if I should be my own trumpeter. But all knowledge is not for the best of us, and the laddie needs mathematics. For that reason he'll go a session or two to Aberfourie. I have spoken to Andrew Sinclair on the matter, and he's ready and willing to help. Evan can walk there and back daily without putting himself the least about; and while he's working with Andrew at mathematics I'll keep him jogging with the classics at home."

It was with difficulty that Jessie restrained herself from embracing the dominie before the assembled company, and as for David, he knew not where he was.

"Books are generally the most expensive part of the business," pursued Mr. Proudfoot. "But I have some and Andrew has more, and I don't think there'll be much cost on that score. Do you fall in with my proposal?"

"Fall in?" responded Neil quickly. "I think it will pe gey and queer if we will not fall in."

"Ay, inteet," put in Red Sandy. "Evan and me had a wee tifference one time—he played a wee trick on me, but that is all past, long past; ay, inteet."

Even Mrs. Macgregor gave a cheerful assent, and the motion was carried without a syllable from David. But no one could look into his shining eyes and imagine he dissented.

"You'll be taking the laddie in yourself, dominie," said Neil, with the countenance of a boy planning a holiday, "and I will drive you in the machine. Ay, and we will just all pe going too. When Evan will pe a pig man he will mind the jaunt."

And in the machine they went, every man of them, under the captaincy of Mr. Proudfoot, who, as Neil admiringly observed, was born to command. Jessie saw them off, saying to herself that Evan looked bright and "snod"; then returned to her aunt to dwell in a fever of imagination on the events of the day.

They passed off so gloriously that in the evening everybody returned elated and full of prophecies. The dominie in his jubilation had got "a wee thought owre merry" perhaps; but a cup of Lisspeth's brisk tea steadied his frolicsome wits and made him grave and practical. At parting he gripped David passionately by the hand.

"I hate boasting," he said; "but I cannot help thinking we have sown this day for a great harvest. Any way, the laddie must get a chance. There must be no little intrusions when he's busy: it's these seemingly trifling interruptions that ruin the student and drive the teacher mad. And, Pitweem," he went on, turning to Neil, "I've a bit of admonition to give you. Crops and soils, seedtime and harvest, sowing and planting, and harrowing and reaping and feeding cattle—these are things to which the farmer must give his mind and strength; but if you dare to take that boy from his books to do the smallest job of farm work, I'll call down the very blackest curses of Heaven on that mop you call your head."

"Trust me, dominie," returned Neil. "Just trust me. Do you know what I am thinking? well! it iss just this, that I will pe the proud man to pe the uncle of a fine scholar."

"Pitweem," said the dominie, "I honour you for your sentiments: they do you credit; but admirable as they are, they don't do you half the credit that your nephew will if he gets fair play. Now mind my words: none of your dodges to get odd jobs out of him. When you want a thing done do it yourself; it's the only way of being sure it's done properly."

"The dominie's a droll preacher," said Neil, beaming as at a piece of flattery. "But his toctrine will pe gey and good whatever, and am just the sinner to mind it."



At eight o'clock next morning Evan strode off alone to Aberfourie with a strap full of books slung over his shoulder, and a buoyant hope pulsing in his heart. The sun was shining as he swung along the high road, and his father and sister watching him remarked it was a good omen.

CHAPTER VIII

In Burnside School there was no assistant teacher; in Aberfourie Academy there was a corps of assistants, all brilliant young men fresh from college examinations, "panged fou" of the newest knowledge and inspired by an implacable disdain for old fogeys and antiquated methods. Having traversed all the fields of learning by the royal road of editors' and commentators' notes, they carried themselves with an air of omniscience and infinity that overwhelmed the timid and the ignorant. How, asked more than one baffled trembling learner, had these geniuses scaled the sheer heights whence they looked abroad with such a sovereign penetrating eye upon all the schemes of men and all the secrets of nature, or how could a mere average atom of humanity ever hope to obtain even so much as a nail's paring of what lay so neatly packed and arranged in those sleek, shining, perfumed, marvellously groomed polls? Here and there a profane disciple of Job professed to wonder how wisdom could possibly survive them.

Into the hands of these Olympians Evan was delivered by the head master, with an epitome of his qualities, so far as known, and instructions to watch and report progress. The start was distinctly inauspicious. No later than the second day he had a difference with the classical master, which developed into gross rebellion. It arose over a point of Latinity, an insignificant matter of quantity. Evan endured the correction, the inevitable snub, and the scornful question whether *that* was how they did things at Burnside; but when there was added a personal taunt which was wholly gratuitous, all at once an open book went slap into the face of the sneering Olympian.

"That's how we do things at Burnside," was the succinct message, from between clenched teeth, that accompanied the missile.

Nothing so unexpected, so mad, so startlingly dramatic had ever agitated the serene classical spirit in Aberfourie Academy. The scholars, breathless at once with horror and joy, felt the new boy was ruined, and the master, striding wildly out of the room with a handkerchief to his damaged mouth, was also quite certain on the subject.

The offender was flamingly indifferent. With a tingling heat in his veins and a savage singing in his ears, he looked after the disappearing teacher as if meaning to follow and deliver a charge in the rear. The door banged, and he turned swiftly upon his companions as if inviting a challenge.

It came presently in the form of a summons from Mr. Sinclair. The interview that ensued in the head master's private room was quiet but heart-searching. In measured polite, precise, unmistakable terms the culprit was informed that his conduct was wholly incompatible with ruling principles of discipline, and that if another outbreak occurred it would be necessary, for the common as well as the individual good, to use the rod of correction severely. Having regard to the boy's position, and perhaps more than a suspicion of the provocation he had received, Mr. Sinclair added a friendly but pointed admonition about the wisdom of controlling the temper.

It was Evan's first encounter with a suave, unimpassioned man of the world, who reproved without anger, admonished in tones that were almost urbane, and spoke of punishment with a judicial calm; and he was impressed as no violence could impress him. For already he had eyes for the vital; already he knew when a man meant what he said. Long afterwards and in much altered circumstances he remembered the incident, and in his heart thanked Mr. Sinclair for the invaluable lesson in self-command.

It was only on reflection, however, that its full excellence appeared. Just then the aboriginal was seething far too hotly within him to be instantly subdued and converted. He listened to indictment and lecture without a word of defence or palliation, but also without a word of repentance, and when he returned to the class-room the sight of the enemy was to his simmering passion as a blast to a

smouldering furnace. But happily the gods were kind, and prevented reprisals.

Outside they suspended their tender offices, and broils were thick in consequence. It is the chivalrous custom of the town boy to treat the pure bucolic as the picador treats the bull that is to make sport for the gathered multitude. Sometimes the picador finds the fun on the wrong side; sometimes the town boy is foiled in his own game. Evan ran the gauntlet of wits and pugilists as one enjoying the pastime, giving unstintedly of the rough side of his tongue and the hardest points of his knuckles as the occasion required. He was beaten often, but it soon came to be understood that he was not to be conquered, and presently the leaders admitted him to all the rights and privileges of comradeship. For the juvenile savage, being satisfied on points of pluck and honour, has fundamental notions of fairness.

Individually the most troublesome of the new schoolmates was Master Douglas Macnair, the prospective successor to Dr. Forbes. This mettlesome young gentleman had heard of Evan's presumptions for the future, and watched sleeplessly for a chance to break the audacious spirit that so dared to aspire. There was no difficulty whatever in devising means of provocation; but when the combat came off, very privately within a cordon of gleeful aiders and abettors, the result was held to be unsatisfactory to the challenger. A second contest ended in such unmitigated disaster to the doughty Douglas that his backers had to intervene. He was then weeping, gory, and temporarily blind of one eye; but, refusing to be comforted, he made straight from the field of battle to the Free Kirk manse to exhibit his deplorable condition and explain how he had been set upon.

Some hours later as Evan was tramping home, nowise conscience-stricken by the day's events, the Rev. Murdoch Macnair passed him in a pony chaise, and in passing (for there was no evading him) he received one portentous look which needed no interpretation.

Upon reaching Pitweem Mr. Macnair found Lisspeth alone, and at once laid the case before her. She took exactly the view of it he had anticipated. Lifting her hands in sympathetic horror, she desired to know what the world was coming to when good, harmless little boys,

ay, even minister's sons, were wantonly mauled and maltreated.

"Inteet, sir, he will pe an awful fighter," she said, after expressing a fear that her nephew was possessed of a devil. "He will do just the same to my Dougal. I do not know, am shure, what iss to pecome of him."

While they were still dolefully discussing the matter Neil entered, beaming, cordial, and mud-stained, a heartsome breath of wind in a morbid oppressive gloom. He wrung the minister's limp hand with the grip of a Hercules; and, glancing round the room, inquired with boisterous goodwill why in the sacred name of friendship there was no sign of tea, nor, deng him! even of a dram? What was Lisspeth thinking of that she should so far forget herself? Did she imagine people visited her to sit dry-mouthed and pinched in the stomach? Fuich, fuich, she ought to be more mindful of her duties. Let the cheering cup be prepared at once, and meantime where was the bottle?

His reverence put aside the question of hospitalities by observing in his solemnest ministerial manner there was more serious business on hand. Thereupon Neil, promptly adjusting his countenance to the gravity of the occasion, asked what was amiss. Briefly, tersely, yet with the needneedful wealth of colour and realistic detail, Mr. Macnair repeated the account of Evan's misdeeds. Neil was deeply grieved, wondered why young rascals could not keep their hands to themselves instead of peppering each other's faces, hoped Douglas's wounds would soon heal and his closed eye reopen, and in general was the pink of politeness and sympathy. But it was noted that he was somewhat vague, and abstained from saying a single word about the punishment that was due to the criminal.

The Rev. Murdoch Macnair bit his lip. Neil's evasiveness was unkind. It lacked the implicit faith, the childlike trust, that ought to be reposed in a minister's word. Was it possible that Neil doubted the absolute and irrefragable truth of the statement? Could he, the perverse son of Thomas, imagine that one who had preached with perfect acceptance for nearly a quarter of a century, was capable of deviating from naked fact by so much as a hair's breadth?

Revolving this disagreeable question in his mind Mr. Macnair chanced to look out of the window, and spied



David going from his work. He seemed to consider for a moment, and then turning with a little smile, suggested that the culprit's father should be called in to hear what had happened. Lisspeth accordingly ran forward, tapped, and beckoned urgently.

David, who had learned to dread these sudden and informal invitations, entered with a cold feeling at his heart, and was confirmed in his misgivings by the still colder greeting of the minister. Sitting on the edge of a chair, and holding the back of another with a twitching hand he heard the damning story of his son's crimes. The effect was a reeling head and a world turned to darkness. Seeing him writhe as if under a sentence of damnation, the accuser remembered the quality of mercy which pertains to the Gospel of Jesus, and graciously commiserated.

"It is a painful thing to say," observed the preacher of peace and forgiveness, "but I am much afraid that boy is fated to bring his parent's grey hair in sorrow to the grave." And thus consoled, David answered with an involuntary groan.

"I might have taken a different course, a course easier to myself than the one I am pursuing," continued the minister. "But I did not wish to be the means of wrecking the boy's life, and so I came direct to yourself. I am very sorry for your sake, David, very sorry indeed."

"And what do you want me to do?" asked David, ignoring the expression of condolence.

"I do not *want* you to do anything," answered Mr. Macnair, "but if I might make a suggestion I think the wisest course would be to withdraw him quietly from the school. If this is the beginning, what will the end be? But there, David, there, your trial is sore enough already, and I wouldn't by word or act add to the pain of your feelings."

And having delivered his message of peace and given of his bounty of Christian charity, the Rev. Murdoch Macnair drove off; and David went home supperless. Neil walked with him ostensibly to arrange the morrow's work, but in reality to see that Evan had fair play.

They found the reprobate poring over a book as innocently as if he had never blackened an eye or bled a nose in his life. But his father's first look told him his sins were coming home to roost.

"Shut that book, Evan," cried David in Gaelic. "Shut it

at once, and tell me what you have been doing to-day. Tell me every word, and as God above is your witness tell me the truth."

Jessie, who had heard the story of her brother's trespasses (not without wicked satisfaction) and feared the issue, was ready with every guile to distract the attention. She welcomed her uncle with what might have seemed inordinate warmth, remarking what a stranger he was in the house, and saying her father was much later than usual and must be dead tired, hastened to set his chair for him in his own cosy corner. But David was not to be diverted nor induced to sit down.

"Let me stand," he said excitedly. "Let me stand. I can hear better this way."

Evan, who needed no prompter to whisper what part of the day's proceedings he was expected to dscribe, related the history of the fight with his customary frankness, adding as the sole excuse for his conduct, "I had either to thrash him or let him call me coward."

"It was his fault?" said David with a painful intensity.

"He sent to me three times," returned Evan, "and the last time he said he would make me a laughingstock to the whole school if I was afraid."

David drew a long breath, a breath of infinite relief, but Neil was the next to speak.

"And if you were afraid," cried that gentleman in his mother tongue, "as sure as death I would never own you again, never."

And almost as he spoke the words Mr. Proudfoot walked in to make inquiries about Evan's studies. A glance told him that something was wrong, and instinctively he began to wonder what fresh scrape Evan had got into now.

"I hope," he said, looking from one to another, "I am not intruding. If so let me retire."

"Retire," cried Neil, joyfully. "You will just pe the fery man we will want. Tell him apout it, Evan, tell him quick. As sure's am living it will pe the pest thing I haf ever hard."

The tale was retold, the master listening with a face that shaded swiftly from curiosity to hot indignation.

"Damn his nose and damn his eyes too," was the unprofessional comment of the dominie when he had learned the facts. "I only wish I had been there to show Evan

where to hit. But he seems to have done very creditably. I have the best hopes of him."

David breathed a little more easily, but his mind was still troubled.

"If it had been any one else," he said partly to himself, partly to the company at large. "And then it'll be so much against Evan at school."

"As to that," responded the dominie promptly, "Pitweem will drive me into Aberfourie to-morrow afternoon, and I'll see Andrew Sinclair about it. Minister's son or no minister's son, we're going to have justice."

"It'll only make things worse if it's found out that Douglas himself was to blame," said David in a fresh spasm of fear.

"Douglas," answered the dominie, "must make shift to lie on his bed as he makes it just like the rest of us. Maybe if he gets into the pot he boiled for other folk it'll teach him more sense than ever his reverend daddie is likely to impart. To-morrow afternoon, Pitweem, you'll get that shauchlin thing you call the machine ready, and we'll have a trip together in the interest of good morals. Don't argue against it, please," noticing that David wished to speak. "It'll be arranged without any argument; for I taught Andrew Sinclair fair play myself. But mark you this, you fire-flint," he added illogically, turning to Evan: "if I catch you in such a scrape again, by all that's sacred, I'll lay on with the muckle black ruler—I will. Now what are you doing in the way of lessons?"

CHAPTER IX

THE accused emerged from the protracted ordeal of the court-martial with streamers triumphantly flying; but the accuser, slinking forth by a back door, went off crestfallen and wry-mouthed over the triple dose of defeat, disgrace, and desertion. The beating and the shame he might have endured, for he carried a brazen front in such matters; but to be forsaken just when he most needed the means of revenge was to be shorn of his limbs in the moment of neces-

sity. So, with the bitterness of impotency in his heart, he ground his teeth, turning green with spite, and cursed his adherents for cowards and traitors.

The deserters themselves took a more fastidious view of the case. They had loyally marched with him to the battle ground, thrown their caps in the air at the booming of his big drum, and were ready with huzzas for his victory. But finding his standard trampled, discredited and dishonoured, in the dust, they hastened to transfer their allegiance to the winning side.

They had no suspicion of being on the track of a great principle: they merely acted on the supremely beautiful instinct which prompts the wise and prudent to shout in the crucial change of fortune, "The king is dead; long live the king." And their red-hot fealty was given to the new leader without hesitancy or disguise.

Tradition, our best historian of the salient, cherishes certain characteristics of the hero at that time of crisis. Respecting his modest self-possession the records are unanimous. The sudden and dizzying elevation produced no symptom of vertigo. Even his enemies do not seem to have suspected him of arrogance, or found cause to whisper maliciously of swelled head.

His deeper traits and qualities were not to be read like a book in a familiar tongue. Already complexities and contradictions of character were beginning to puzzle his friends. Though dowered with a gift of speech that could charm unruly youngsters into breathless silence when he chose to exercise it in the right direction, he was much more given to doing than to talking. His code of honour was nice enough to be considered quixotical, and was frequently found troublesome. As between man and man, he invariably meant what he said; that was one of the first anomalies noticed by the observant. And as he punctiliously kept his word, even to the challenge and whatever effects might follow, so he was exacting in the fulfilment of covenants by the other side. The popular practice of wriggling out of engagements and laughing over the feat was suspended when he was concerned, for he had the hardest muscle and the best nerve in the school. By virtue of the same endowments it was felt he was dangerous to meddle with unwarily. For the rest, he was high-spirited, gay, laughter-loving, generous, moody sometimes, whimsical

often, proud as Lucifer, sensitive as an uncovered nerve, gentle, explosive, easily offended and easily won, invincible of will, and withal possessed of the most miraculous knack of getting, or perhaps more correctly of taking, his own way. Finally, when he asked a favour, twenty henchmen were ready to blacken each other's eyes for the honour of obliging him. And Douglas stood off, with all his juices turning acid, and watched, biding a chance that never came.

All the while the studies progressed apace. Every evening Mr. Proudfoot and his pupil worked together, and as the examinations hove in sight the mornings also were consecrated to the classics. Four hours daily made the average for five days in the week; on Saturday the four became seven or eight, and on Sunday it was with difficulty the dominie restrained his zeal sufficiently to permit him to attend kirk. While the classical studies thus appeared to engross Evan's energies, Mr. Sinclair reported that, though the lad was likely to do tolerably in Greek and Latin, his forte unquestionably lay in mathematics.

"He will probably take to science," said the Rector.

Mr. Proudfoot smiled, remarking, "We shall see."

The great time came with much suppressed excitement, doubt, elation, depression, and infinite fret of nerve and temper. Three days the fever raged among teachers and taught; then there was an interval of calm; then again a swift rising of the temperature as the lists became due. They brought many surprises, several grievous disappointments, and, in at least one case, confusion to the cocksure. Douglas and Evan were in the same classes, and though the head master discouraged prophecy as a sheer tempting of the gods, there was a secret disposition to bet on the latter. Since, however, the former was tutored by his scholarly father, those who were really competent to foretell, naturally had no manner of misgiving about the issue. So the Free Kirk manse composed its smug face, laced its fat fingers, and waited complacently to be glorified.

But the examiners had no sense of things. Where they ought to have put Douglas Macnair they put Evan Kinloch, not once nor twice, but three times. The herd laddie who had moved his minister's sneer and smile of pity was a triple prizeman—first of his class in classics, first in mathematics, first in English, and not only winner, but so

far excelling in Greek and Latin, that the examiners made a special note on his proficiency. Some of the folk at the Free Kirk manse went to bed that night with a savage headache, and omitted to say their prayers.

The victor took matters serenely.

"The young gentleman bears himself," wrote Mr. Sinclair to Mr. Proudfoot, "as if he were not the least conscious of having done aught remarkable."

Nor was he. He had merely answered certain questions concerning certain things he had learned. Where was the ground for boasting?

It was Mr. Proudfoot and not Evan who got drunk on the strength of the victory; and the scandal coming to the ears of the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, that guardian of respectability resolved to have the master of Burnside School removed for gross indecency of conduct. But when he made the proposal, somehow it was received with such meaning smiles, such nods and pokings in the ribs, that he had not the heart to press it.

In due course the affair came before the High Court assembled in the taproom of the Inver Arms, Aberfourie, for revision of judgment, and the judges were inclined to levity.

"I've kent dominie Proudfoot twenty year if I've kent him a day," declared Tom Whittat the smith, "and he's been a steady drinker a' that time—and mair. Ye ken hoo often we've had to put him to bed in a corner here, Duncan, when he hed na a fit to put under him," he added, turning to the landlord.

"Ay," answered the landlord, smiling thoughtfully. "The dominie's been a good friend to me."

"Well! what bamboozles me," continued the smith, "is that the minister should be sae lang in findin' oot his bits o' fauts. And what an extrodinar curious thing it is to think the splore should happen to come just when the son was lickit by one o' the dominie's scholars."

"I fair wonder to hear you speaking," observed Johnny Cooper the wee wright. "Has the smiddy smoke dried up all the sense in your noddle? It's the minister's vowcation to hunt sinners just as Airchy here," nodding at a gamekeeper who had dropped in, "hunts the brock for his foul ways. Would ye have him slack in doin' his duty? He's waited twenty year to find oot the truth, and he's fand it."

"And what is the truth?" demanded Tom, never remembering he had the high sanction of Pilate for the question.

"It's grand fun speirin' the gate, ye ken," said the little wright. "He's discovered that religion and barley bree'll no mix."

"Quite an oreeginal discovery," put in big Hugh Campbell, the Perth drover, then up for the weekly fair. "But if ye tell me a man's fit till pronoonce on that point till he's been at the very least three times blin' and bambaized himsel', I'll take the liberty o' tellin' ye yer a leer o' the first watter. Has anybody ever seen the minister fou?"

"A Free Kirk minister fou!" cried Johnny Cooper. "Sic a godless thing to ask."

Whereupon there were more chucklings and head-shakings, and the court, with the most remarkable unanimity and good humour, consented to refresh itself at the expense of the drover.

Meanwhile the jubilation at Pitweem lacked neither countenance nor heartiness. Neil joined in it as a matter of course, so did Red Sandy, and in such a handsome manner, that at the conclusion he had to be driven home in "the machine," his crutch and staff being utterly unequal to the occasion. And Lauchie Duff, whose scent, when festivities were afoot, was sure at ten miles distance, looked in casually with his old fiddle.

"I was drouthy and thocht there might be buttermilk about," he explained innocently.

"You drink large quantities of buttermilk, Lauchie," remarked the dominie. "I'd know that by the bloom on your nose."

"It's the wind," said Lauchie. "The wind's a sair enemy o' the nose. I kenned a teetotaler once, and the weest puff just made his nose like a furnace door. Folk said it fizzed at sicht o' water, and others that it frichted the drunken into soberness. But it's a dreigh thing," he added, looking round, "to be dry and draigled at the same tiime. Maybe a body could hae a seat to ease his shanks, and just a mouthfu', guidwife; cauld in the stomach's ill to bide."

"Did you ever hear of the wonderful feat of the Cow of Forfar?" asked Mr. Proudfoot.

"Ye ken a' thing," said Lauchie, "tell us."

"Faith, it's reported on good authority she took a standing drink," said the dominie.

"Aweel," responded Lauchie, taking a chair, "am better providit nor she was, poor beast. The hinner end o' a coo's no handy for sittin' doon on; mine as ye might say is made exclusively for that purpose."

He had something to warm him internally, and as he smacked his lips Mr. Proudfoot observed,

"And you have yet another advantage over your friend the cow, her virtue never shone in her snout. Think what a light in the forepeak you carry. It's a wonderful provision of Nature that makes a man's virtue blossom so luxuriantly where it can best be seen."

"Ay," said Lauchie gravely. "And there's mair wonderfu' things nor that. Have ye ever considered hoo ae cockroach kens anither? Me and you's baith got fine nebs, dominie, though maybe a wee thocht deeper in the pent than is athegither consistent wi' beauty—so let well enough a-be. Would you like to greet, dominie? It might help to cool ye."

"Yes," returned the dominie, "I'm feeling very much that way listening to you. Is the fiddle sentimental?"

"Oh, just able to croon a bit," answered Lauchie, screwing up. A moment later he struck into "The Flowers of the Forest."

"If ye were providit wi' feet I'd gar ye dance," he said, nodding at Red Sandy. "But bein' as ye are I'll no vex ye wi' stirrin' strains. Yer gettin' auld like the rest o' us. Here's something soft and soothin'. I made auld Bell Thomson greet her een oot wi't the other day."

And he gave them "The Four Maries" in a manner to melt whinstone.

Some hours later, when Bob Conacher and the sedatest horse in Neil's stable took the dominie and Red Sandy home happy and inarticulate, Lauchie retired to the barn singing,

> "'And twenty pipers at break of day,
> In twenty different bog-holes lay,
> Serenely sleeping on their way
> From the wedding of Shon MacLean.'

"Ay," says he, as he turned in the barn door to bid Neil good-night and nod to the new moon, "it's an uncanny thing to be dumpit like a dead sheep in a bog hole, and a weet ditch is little better. Lord! what I hae suffered frae weddin's and berials and christenin's, and siclike graceless



kerryins on. I'll never be quit o' the rheumatics they've gi'en me, if I was to be as auld as Mathusalum, wha had a mortal unfair share o' life. Am jalousin' it'll stick to me through a' eternity."

"Oh, just wait," said Neil piquantly. "Maype you will pe glad to haf the rheumatics yet."

"Ah! yer a deep deevil, Pitweem, for a' yer guileless ways," rejoined Lauchie, thrusting the end of his bow into Neil's ribs. "If a' tales be true there's little fear o' rheumatics ortakin' the cauld either where some folks is goin'. What am wonderin' is what'll become o' oor friend Red Sandy's wooden shanks. They'll no stand the climate owre weel."

"Go to ped, Lauchie," said Neil severely. "It was good for you if you will pe like Red Sandy."

"Am sure I'd be the last to tramp on anybody's toes," observed Lauchie. "And if Sandy's safe am glad to hear it, for it'll gie hert to the rest o' us. Only ye canna keep thochts oot o' yer head; and ye've gi'en me a veesion o' Sandy thumbin' a harp. Ye'll no be angry if it gars me lauch a wee. If am there I hope there'll be cotton-wool handy."

"You are just a plasphemious wicked sinner, Lauchie," answered Neil.

"Am no' misdootin ye in the least, Pitweem," said Lauchie sweetly. "But am goin' to take a thocht and mend ane o' thir days. There'll be sheep o' a' colours and countries at the Great Gatherin', am told, and maybe—wha kens?—a black and battered straiggler will be allowed to slip in wi' the rest for a' that's come and gane, and the Magdalene waitin' ahint the jaspar gates to welcome it. What d'ye think o' that? But no to go so far ahead, are ye insured if I put a spunk to yer strae in the nicht? I like to hae a smoke by mysel' in the dark; it kind o' consoles me for the wickedness o' the world."

Neil clutched the shadowy figure.

"Leave your spunks with me," he cried.

"Hands off!" said Lauchie.

"Your spunks!" reiterated Neil, tightening his grip. "Your spunks, or out of this."

"I thocht that would gie yer hert a wallop," chuckled Lauchie. "Weel, feel my pooches for yersel', they're just as fou o' spunks as Adam's was afore the tailor made him breeks frae that fig-leaf. Now let me till my prayers."



"You will need them, Lauchie my man," said Neil, releasing the fiddler.

"Av coorse yer abune the need o' them," returned Lauchie, stottering into the darkness. "It's a great peety a sinner runs sae muckle risk o' deein' for want o' company in this righteous world. Weel, good-night, Pitweem: for a' yer virtues yer no a bad deevil ava."

"Good-night," said Neil.

And listening a moment he heard grunts and rustlings as Lauchie made himself comfortable among the straw.

CHAPTER X

ELSEWHERE the gladness was yet more fervent, though it found expression with different rites. Jessie hugged her brother till he inveighed vehemently against the absurdities of girls, vowing he would never win again if she did not instantly cease her folly; and possessing to the full a woman's charming gift of perversity, she became the more disorderly for the threat. But David took his joy by himself in a solitary walk in the spruce woods. From that still cathedral, gloriously lighted by the red beam of the departing sun and odorous with the balm of a thousand censers, there went up the wordless thank-offering and the prayer that this success and whatever it might portend should be to the glory of God and the boy's good. And the pulpit seemed nearer than ever before.

Mr. Proudfoot likewise had his secret and sober delight. When he got over the immediate effect of the celebration he wrote a glowing letter to Mr. Dudley, and was transported to the seventh heaven of rapture by the intelligence that the great financier would be pleased to give some special prizes for competition among the scholars at Aberfourie Academy, if the authorities would permit him. The authorities were gracious, and gave their consent. The prizes, two in number, were to be of the annual value of twenty, and ten pounds, tenable for four years, and were to be continued at the donor's pleasure.

"I think I can tell," said the dominie, "where the first of these will go."

And, indeed, Mr. Dudley knew too, his generosity being prompted solely by his prophetic knowledge. The second examination came, and Evan took all the honours that were to be gained, including Mr. Dudley's twenty pounds; the ten pounds going to Douglas Macnair, who still struggled gallantly and hopelessly for premier place.

In the third examination the chief results were a foregone conclusion with both teachers and pupils. The great prize of the school, a three years' scholarship of fifty pounds, involving an Arts Course in Edinburgh University, was allotted ahead, even Douglas concurring; some minor distinctions were likewise thrown in, and the prophecies had due fulfilment. The Rev. Murdoch Macnair, knowing no way of controverting facts, muttered something about prodigies, and strove to accept the decrees of Nature philosophically. If Heaven had seen fit to make Evan Kinloch something of a miracle, his reverence, though much marvelling, felt bound to submit. So he merely remarked that for a boy caught wild in the fields Evan's achievement was rather surprising, and, as far as possible, avoided the subject.

Mr. Sinclair, less self-contained in his elation, could not refrain from communicating with Mr. Proudfoot. The letter was delivered by Evan himself in the little schoolhouse on a soft summer evening just as the master was finishing his day's work.

"We can do no more for Evan Kinloch." So the Rector of Aberfourie Academy wrote. "He has accomplished, and more than accomplished, all that you predicted of him. I lose my brightest scholar. I have never had his like, nor can I hope, ever to have his like again. He has set a fresh record, a thing inevitably gratifying to a teacher. I withdraw the statement that his forte is mathematics: his forte is anything he pleases. What is to come we know not, but this much may be said with safety, that if he but half fulfils the promise of the start

> " 'He'll be a credit till us a',
> We'll a' be proud o' Robin.' "

Lifting his eyes, the dominie gazed wistfully for a moment at his visitor.

"Ay, we'll a' be proud o' Robin," he murmured. "We're proud of him now, but we'll be yet prouder by-and-by."

Under a sudden impulse he stepped forward and took Evan by the hand.

"Come," he said, "and sit down on this bench beside me. I want to have a quiet talk with you."

They sat by a window that opened upon a glorious prospect of slope and mountain just then a flaming gold in the radiance of the late June sun. There were people at work in the fields, carts were crawling hither and thither, sheep and cattle were browsing, an occasional dog barked and was silent, and above all were peaks of fire setting the flushed heavens ablaze.

"It's a bonnie look-out, isn't it?" said the dominie. "If it were worth while a body could indite poetry about it. But what's the profit of rhyme and jingle? It's better just to sit here quietly in the gloaming thinking one's own bits of thoughts and watching the stars of the twilight coming out, the serene and everlasting stars."

Evan observed that the scene was very beautiful.

"More than beautiful, Evan," said the dominie. "It speaks to the soul things not utterable in words. It breathes

> " 'The still sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.'

To chasten and subdue! Wordsworth knew the secret. And isn't it strange to think," he went on slowly, "that before we were born that hillside was thousands of times just as it is now, and that after we're dead and most of us forgotten it'll be thousands of times the same again? The generations tramp on, fret, worry, scheme, execute, laugh a little, sorrow a great deal, beck, bow, and pass into the night, but the granite hills remain and the green grass is regularly renewed. You remember the image in Homer:

> "Like the race of leaves
> The race of man is:
> The wind in autumn strows
> The earth with old leaves; then spring the woods
> With new endows.'

Your own Ossian has precisely the same image; and a yet higher poet tells that One 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.' But it wasn't about these things that I wanted to talk to you,

though they force themselves on a man's mind at times. You and I have had many a good hour together, and we've done some work that was pleasant in the doing, and now we are going to part. That, too, is in the way of life."

"I owe you much, sir," said Evan in a low voice.

"We'll not speak of that," rejoined the dominie. "What we have done we have done, and as to owing, that's chiefly between your Maker and yourself. He gave the brains; you used them—your auld dominie just tried to show you how. And that brings me to my point—and mind, I'm not speaking as your dominie now, I cannot be that any more, but as a friend." He softly caressed the hand he held. "A friend, laddie, a good deal the waur o' the wear, but proud of you and seeing your possibilities as perhaps you cannot see them yourself; and in a word this is what I have to say: You have got your chance. It is said that every one of us gets a chance at least once in a lifetime; some have many chances, but all have one each. Yours has come; and as you value the love of them who love you, as you desire peace of mind and would avoid the gnawings of remorse, do not miss it. Take the tide that leads on to fortune; hoist sail and out into the deep; Only when you are sailing gallantly with all your canvas set, 'Say I taught thee, found thee a way, a sure and safe one, though thy master missed it.' "

He spoke with a little quaver of the voice that was singularly inconsistent in a cynic, and as if by a common instinct the two lifted their eyes simultaneously and looked out of the window.

"There is something I want you to get off by heart," the dominie went on presently, "and remember always. It will have no profound meaning for you now, but as you grow older and mix with men and learn the ways of the world you will understand it all. It is a father's advice to his son, and better never passed human lips. Give me a pen and I'll write it down for you." And on a leaf torn from an old exercise book he wrote:

> "To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

"Whatever else you may remember or forget," he said, after reading the lines aloud, "do not forget that. It con-

tains the wisdom of all the centuries. Get it stamped on your mind, and never fash asking," he added, with a pathetic smile, "how some we could name knew it and heeded not. If they were fools, that is their affair, not yours. For you the pregnant moment has come."

He took the boy's hand again caressingly, and Evan, breathing under restraint, glanced in an embarrassed way at the master's face, which glistened strangely, but he did not attempt to withdraw his hand.

Again the two looked out. The gold was waning, vanishing magically before their eyes. The shadows, gliding stealthily up the slopes, had dimmed the fields, turned the woods to crowded masses of blackness, and taken sole possession of the gullies; the labourers were passing off the scene like spectres into their native night, and lowing cattle were slowly going home to be milked. The mountain-tops alone were still alight.

Looking up in a long pause of speech, the dominie noted, not for the first time, the contrast of height and hollow. They were essentially the same; they lay as it were cheek by cheek, were fanned by the same winds, soaked by the same rain, warmed by the same sun, yet what a mighty difference!

"A symbol of life," reflected the dominie. "One is a little up and his sublime head is glorified in sight of the whole world; another is a little down and he is lost in the gloom of obscurity. There is only a step between, but

"'The little less, and what worlds away!'"

He did not, however, disclose his thoughts to the lad at his side. Instead, moving a little closer, he talked of the big world into which Evan was about to adventure—of professors, prizes, and examinations, and such other matters as might interest the ambitious scholar.

They sat thus side by side talking until the fires died on the multiple peaks, and the darkness stole in like an impalpable presence, wrapping them gently in sable, so that they could scarce discern each other. Then they rose and passed out together into the mild effulgence of a starry night, still conversing earnestly, not as master and pupil, but as friend to friend.

CHAPTER XI

SIMULTANEOUSLY with Evan's triumph the Dudleys made their second visit to the Highlands. Instead, however, of cabining themselves in the straightened Pitweem, they rented a gaudy palace especially "erected for summer gentry," about a mile nearer to Aberfourie. Craigdhu it was facetiously named, because it lay so cosily tucked among ambrosial woods that, standing upon its front steps, you had not even a glimpse of black rock or scowling precipice. For your speculative builder is a practical humourist, and, save the fun of plucking geese, loves nothing better than the pleasantry of satirising Nature.

Craigdhu effectually inspired a poet's pen to the "fine frenzy" which fascinates wealthy people looking out for summer quarters. Advertisements in southern papers imaginatively described it as "a first-rate gentleman's residence" (the epithet first-rate being applicable to gentleman or residence at your fancy), "spacious, elegant, perfect in all its appointments, replete with every modern convenience, and situated in the very heart of the sublimest scenery in the British Isles." There were deft allusions to romantic dells, flashing waterfalls, umbrageous nooks, soaring mountains, rugged cliffs, a picturesque peasantry, and eagles nobly aloft in the blue, the whole being shrewdly pointed and driven home by a pat quotation from the commercial saviour of the Highlands—Walter Scott. Not the least of the thousand and one advantages of the place was that it had a climate all its own, an exclusive and inimitable climate which combined the best qualities of the climates of Greece, Italy and Switzerland, "without their defects."

Into this Eden came the Dudleys at a rent that would make an earl's mouth water. Since their previous visit Mr. Dudley's fortune had expanded so mightily that Pitweem thrice enlarged could not have held half his princely retinue, his servants, his dogs, his horses, his carriages, and the endless et ceteras that hamper the happy millionaire. It was said he was making money faster than he knew how to spend it; that there was scarce an auriferous pie in England

worth touching in which he had not a finger that invariably came out a massy bar of gold. The fortunate man had, in fact, discovered the long-sought secret of alchemy; he was Midas without the curse; whatever he touched turned to coin of the realm and brought unstinted blessing. In the Aberfourie alehouses and by the chimney cheeks of farmers it was freely stated that beyond any doubt whatever he could buy up the biggest landed proprietor in the county, be he duke, earl, or baronet, and scarce feel his pocket the lighter. For when the Celtic imagination invades the sphere of romance it does things on a scale of imposing magnitude.

But, in sober truth, Mr. Dudley was thriving prodigiously, His name was magical in circles of which Logieburn parish knew nothing, and would have understood nothing had it known. Astute, sagacious, far-seeing men of affairs, steel-cold Shylocks, long-beaked brokers, keen-scented "bulls" and "bears," those who tossed the market up and those who clawed it down, grandees of trade, magnates of the Exchange, kings and princes of the golden realms of speculation and commerce, were one and all noting for their private guidance that in the absorbing game of fortune-making it might be well to watch the play of Leonard Dudley. For his boldness at least equalled his sagacity; and his luck was unconscionable. The argosies he sent forth took the breath from seasoned adventurers, yet every ship came home as regularly as the tide returned. It was remembered, too, as a matter not without significance, that his credit and integrity were unblemished by any breath of suspicion. So the investing public learned to put its trust in him, firm in the faith of substantial dividends; and professional speculators marked his moves as if his smallest act were to them an augury of certain gain.

His prosperity he took as a thing intended for daily use, like love and religion and fresh air. Though by no means extravagant in one who found a gold mine whithersoever he turned, his tastes were the reverse of ascetic or miserly. Bearing well in mind

> "How little while we have to stay,
> And, once departed, may return no more,"

either to enjoy hoarded treasure or to resume lapsed opportunities, he was jocund with his plenty, as one who would drink at all pores of the immeasurable rapture of living. A

trite quotation expressed his notions of economy: "Empty-handed we came into the world; empty-handed we go out of it." And the moral seemed to him as plain as the sun at noon.

Of foibles he had enough to yield entertainment to his friends. Though his character was founded as fast on the practical as is the lighthouse on its rock, he yet had his poetical and romantic moods, his fits of dreamy wistfulness, as if in moments of reflection or self-communion his soul craved something beyond scrip and figures, something not wholly dependent upon fluctuating markets. If the truth must be owned, he indulged like the flightiest vagabond of imagination in scopeless fantasies, built baseless fabrics, invested hugely in those delectable foreign securities which neither creditor nor official receiver has ever yet been induced to set down as assets; nay, more, with circumstances cunningly contributing, he could be as profoundly sentimental as that high-priest of adamantine fact, the thrice sentimental Napoleon.

Withal he had a pretty turn for pageantry, for picturesque and pictorial effects. Born in a lustier age, he would infallibly have figured in barbaric shows, tilted in jousts and tournaments, and rendered his heart to quixotic ideals and kingly pomp and ceremonial. Belated to a prosaic time, he did what he could to infuse a pallid anæmic world with the gay spirit of a departed chivalry.

According to his cloth he cut his coat, that is to say, with a fine regard for the superfluous. *Noblesse oblige*, and he was not the man to shirk social obligation. Munificent, catholic, genial, abounding in vitality of all kinds, he used his Fortunatus' purse with a well-considered freedom that was fast gaining him a national reputation. The Society Astronomer Royal reported that a new star of uncommon brilliancy had unexpectedly swum within his ken, and forthwith from innumerable observatories of fashion telescopes of every size and degree were levelled upon the unknown orb. What was its magnitude? Had it antecedents, and if so what were they? how had it contrived to slip to so conspicuous a place in the fashionable heavens? Could fixed stars, luminaries of long and acknowledged standing, recognise it, confer upon it the indispensable *cachet?* and if it were permanent, in what set or constellation was it ultimately to be classed?

These questions were not capable of immediate answer, but they had a sweet piquancy which kept curiosity on the stretch; and pending the verdict of the savants the Press was attentive. When the newcomer was mentioned, the blue pencil of the subeditorial cynic stayed "its devastating course," having learned to discriminate. It is not to be inferred that the natural law was suspended, or the natural order of things in the least disturbed. Though Mayfair may risk its jewelled soul on occasion, it will not blaspheme its religion; and even the profane journalist usually knows on which side his bread is buttered. The Court Hierarchy kept its inviolable place, but in the chronicle of peers, brewers, cabinet ministers, pugilists, play-actors, and the illustrious generally, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Dudley were named frequently and with respect, and their movements recorded as often as these could be ascertained, guessed, or invented.

It need scarcely be said that in consequence of such honours Mr. Dudley was permitted to subscribe generously to all manner of charities, to enlighten the nation on momentous political and social questions, to occupy exalted places at civic functions, to sit on many boards of directors, and, in a word, to consider himself a very great man if he were so minded.

Nevertheless his administration did not escape criticism. It was whispered malignly that he suffered incurably from the fatal itch of ostentation. Let it be owned that he appreciated the value of riches, that he had a genius for sociality, expansion, publicity; loved to spread himself out and feel that he lived, moved, and had a man's being. Moreover, it is not to be denied that he was zealously abetted by his wife. But to the envy that imputed the insolence or arrogance of mere wealth his familiars promptly gave the lie direct, and their judgment may be accepted unrevised.

The man of the world going to Rome prudently assumes the character of a native. In the Highlands the city-bred financier blossomed into a full-blown Highland squire, even to the kilt (though it cost him a cold and countless blushes at the idea of bare legs), the stuffed calves, the gold-mounted skene-dhu, the bronzed face, the glengarry and eagle's feather, and the drinking of whisky neat. Enamoured of kennels and stables, he bought dogs of which he was in mortal terror as long as he owned them, and horses he mounted with a sense of taking his life in his hand. Finding

it essential also to be a sportsman, he dutifully whipped streams and lochs without depriving them of a fish, and blazed away on the moors without bringing down so much as a feather. Finally a dare-devil spirit of emulation landed him on the driver's seat of a four-in-hand, and, as a matter of course, he let the horses bolt through Aberfourie to the joy of every cur and urchin in the village, the screaming terror of mothers, and the scandal of the fat constable, who swore upon his honour that if the thing occurred again he would have the "hale hypothec" locked up and bundled before the sheriff at Perth. He would stand no nonsense; he gave the town his word on that. These things made the Englishman a name where credentials are narrowly examined.

A foible that owed nothing to association with hairy-shanked lairds was a keen delight in fostering merit. Your model laird would as soon think of building churches or demolishing distilleries as of troubling his stuffed head with a peasant boy's ability. Mr. Dudley was differently constituted. Doting upon talent, he was ever eager to encourage it. When he had the luck to come upon it in the budding stage his pleasure was doubled. So he took up Evan with an enthusiasm that turned Logieburn parish into a hotbed of speculation. What were the rich man's designs, and on what principle had he chosen his protégé? Three square fights and more than threescore truculent debates were the result of an effort to arrive at a common understanding on these points. Private opinion was likewise agreeably varied. The dominie bent his brows and looked oracular, as if the thing might not be wholly to his liking; Neil rubbed his over-abounding hands and chuckled with his whole big body; David was sedately glad; Red Sandy, making inordinate demands upon his snuff-mull, declared the mystery was "awful wonderful too;" and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair frankly owned he did not pretend to understand the business, adding axiomatically, and as a possible excuse for his obtuseness, that the ways of Providence, women, and rich men were inscrutable; no body of divinity explains them. Mr. Dudley himself was almost the only one who took a perfectly simple view of the case.

"I knew from the first what was in that boy," he remarked to his wife; "give him time and the world also will know."

Mrs. Dudley smiled sympathetically, and was sure the

prediction would come true, not from clearness of prescience on her own part, but merely because she could not imagine her husband in error. Yet in her heart she was puzzled by his attention to this Highland boy, whose course, however successful, must lie far from them. She understood the lad was to be a minister; and she heard ministers occasionally without any stir either of awe or admiration. In some future year she might return to the Highlands to find Evan thumping the cushions of a village pulpit, but personally she did not conceive the event, though probably momentous to him, would be of any vital concern to her, unless, indeed, his ingenuity should happen to devise new means of salvation. That was not likely. However, adoring her husband well on the other "side of idolatry," she beamed graciously upon the boy, asked him questions about his plans and projects, took an interest in his exploits, mental and physical, and, without any private conviction whatever on the subject, believed he had rather remarkable qualities. It perhaps made her the readier to smile approvingly that he grew up handsome, with a fresh open face, a pair of dark luminous eyes, an abundance of dark wavy hair, the mouth of a cherub, "the most exquisite dimple in the world," to use the lady's own words, and ways that were graceful and engaging. Independently of the pleasures of wifely devotion (in themselves unspeakable), it afforded a mild glow of gratification to countenance a youth so eminently well favoured.

In virtue of these condescensions Evan was a frequent guest at Craigdhu; at times also his teachers were similarly honoured on his account, and their confidential opinions produced in the patron a kind of ecstasy. One evening, as they sat enthusiastic over their wine, he propounded a scheme of assistance, but Mr. Proudfoot promptly shook his head.

"I wouldn't, sir, if I were you," said the dominie emphatically. "If the Kinlochs are poorer than church mice they're prouder than Lucifer. You never, sir, came across a more independent or self-respecting race. Besides, if I'm any judge, the young gentleman is in no need of help. He goes up to the university with seventy pounds a year, a fortune for a frugal Highland laddie, and there are bursaries and scholarships in Edinburgh. Leave him to Hal o' the Wynd's device, sir—let him fight for himself. Believe me, he enjoys the exercise, and would take it as an unkindness

to be borne to the earth with aid. The blood of the fighter has been poured into the veins of Master Evan."

As Mr. Sinclair concurred the scheme was abandoned, but the rich man's ardour was in no wise diminished.

The sunlit fragrant days wore on. Evan was again enrolled in Florence's retinue, and, being swiftly advanced to the position of favourite, was much with the fairy princess. His notions of knight-errantry, like all else about him, were his own. Some of the offices he performed with a nicety fit to shed lustre on the very pink of chivalry; but in others he traitorously forgot the classic models.

The age, unhappily, did not permit him to suffer wounds and privations in his lady's service, but he ran when she desired him to run, and fetched and carried, raided and pillaged according to her sovereign pleasure. He gathered rasps for her from the old thicket, undismayed by thought of stripes and marauding cattle. He stripped the hedges of their wild roses for the adorning of her hair, waded to the waist in slimy ponds because she liked a lily tickling her chin from among the fluffy lace at her throat, "guddled" trout in the burns to enable her to spangle her dress with scales and imbue it with fishy odours, harried the nests of bumble-bees that she might regale on wild honey, and chased squirrels to hear her shout and clap her hands as they sped, with flirting tails, from bough to bough, along the tree-tops, or reconnoitered with glittering eyes from dusky vantage points among the leaves.

Moreover, he told her the Celtic names of hill and valley, river and loch; made her eyes bulge and her flesh creep with eerie legends and tales of walking spirits; taught her Gaelic songs and tender Gaelic speeches which he took studious care she should misapply. Thus he made her implore Red Sandy, of whom she was mortally afraid, for a kiss and a pinch of snuff under pretence she was inquiring in a friendly way for the welfare of his family. Under a similar deception she assured Lauchie Duff he was her very *beau idéal* of a Highland gentleman, a compliment which the enraptured fiddler acknowledged by dancing an improvised reel and Highland fling on the Queen's highway. When she spoke of perfidy her knight had the ill grace to laugh; and he aggravated his offence by laughing the louder the more she pouted, censured, and stamped her dainty, indignant foot. Such baseness was clearly beyond the toleration of one

whose smallest beck would have brought a troop of courtiers instantly to their knees, and in any case would have more than justified summary vengeance. Yet, not only was the scapegrace retained in honour, but the injured mistress, in a moment of confidence with her maid, naïvely confessed that of all who had ever thronged her train, devised fun for her, or dared to mock her anger, he was easily first favourite. Let such as comprehend the feminine heart explain the inconsistency.

Something, however, the instinctive prudence of the little woman held back. It was not so much as hinted by word or look that the grace vouchsafed to the offender was in part at least due to his diverting and frequently-practised trick of making the confidante herself scream. This ever-delightful feat he accomplished in the course of tutorial explorations in the wilder part of broken and scattered spruce woods and the sounding corries of the foot hills; "through open glade, dark glen, and secret dell;" for it was his privilege to instruct Miss Florence in the mystic lore of the mountains. To him that lore was as his mother tongue, a vital part of himself, an intuition rather than an acquirement; and it gushed forth as easily and inevitably as the hillside springs at which the explorers quenched their thirst. Hardly a living thing of the scaur, the heather, or the precipice, but he had invaded in its privacy. He was familiar with the dizzy fastness of the hawk (and to see him climb a scarped cliff was a sufficient certificate of his place of birth), could tell unerringly the tufts in which the peewits and the hares made their beds, knew exactly what bosky depth to beat for the capercailzie or where to set a trap for the weazel, and was deeply versed in the ways of the fox, the stag, and the eagle.

Whether this erudition, so profound and full that its overflowings seemed the facile tale of a romancer, greatly impressed his pupil may fairly be doubted; nor is it at all certain she appreciated the gorgeousness of the flaming horizons, the burning glory of crest and ridge, or the wonder of the flitting lights and shadows on the purple moors, to which her attention was at times directed. But she loved to clamber, to race, to shout, to toss her curls on the windy heights and to drink of the perfumed sunshine. Often, too, she would pause, finger on lip, hearkening to strains of weird music among trees and rocks, and would scarce have

been surprised to see tiny green-coated harpers peering elf-like from twilight nooks. On stories of hunters and smugglers she gloated, and it pleased her mightily to imagine herself breaking the laws of the land by restoring dismantled stills.

But what she enjoyed above all else was the scaring of her attendant. The plan—preconcerted I regret to say—was to lead Florence so close upon the brows of sheer crags and the brinks of foaming linns that the hysterical English governess, who usually panted far behind, seeing the pair appear suddenly on a jutting point with nothing below but space and ravenous water, would shut her eyes and screech. The two scamps would laugh meaningly at each other as the poor woman, quaking, ghastly, and beside herself with fright, shrieked her soul out to the accompanying roar of the torrent. But when the spasm was past and she was trying to recover breath, propped against a convenient rock or sunk on a mossy bole, Florence would artfully negotiate for silence. As the maid was not above making terms, the perilous secrets were kept, and nobody was either the wiser or the worse.

Sometimes, too, Evan had the honour of riding forth with the young lady and her father. On these grand occasions it was his invariable custom to choose the friskiest horse in the stable, which he adroitly encouraged in its high spirits by tickling its ribs with his spurred heels as often as it showed a disposition to lapse into sobriety. Mr. Dudley, who rode with an uncertain rein, a loose seat, and both hands timidly ready for the pommel, admired and partly envied the lad's horsemanship. Of rivalry he durst not think. If he had ever for a moment ventured to entertain the idea, the rude shocks and flusters of the gallop and the perpetual fear of being left ignominiously in a ditch effectually drove it from his head. For on these outings, when his thoughts wandered beyond the immediate necessity of keeping astride his horse, he was mainly occupied with cursing the local fashion that condemned him to risk his neck in a saddle, and with wishing gamesome brutes at the devil.

But then his training had been defective. It had never been his good fortune to ride in steeplechases, over hedges and ditches, with the mane streaming in his face, and for bridle and saddle a hazel switch and his own two legs. He was always well pleased to get the canter over and dismount,

and once again safe on foot he had ready compliments to the skill of a better and hardier horseman. For he knew Evan would have careered joyfully as long as the steed could hold out.

And so the golden days sped gladsomely, with sunshine and flowers and fruits and fair horizons; happiness in the present and for the future hope unbounded. The fairy stream of life flowed gaily through smiling lawns and enchanted gardens, without a sign of rapids, without a whisper of the thunders of a fall.

CHAPTER XII

THE third week in September found the Dudleys back in England. In the fourth, Evan was ready for Edinburgh. On the eve of his going, Neil and Lisspeth, wondrously spruced up for the occasion, called to bid him God-speed in his career of scholar and fine gentleman, and presently the dominie also arrived to say farewell to his pupil. A little later, too, Lauchie Duff, three good sheets in the wind, looked in to give solemn counsel concerning the tone of city fiddles and the guile of city lasses. Lauchie modestly owned that he spoke as a man who had had disagreeable experiences of both.

"Mind this in perticular," said the fiddler, pointing the words unsteadily with his bow, "tak nae nonsense frae anybody; that's my advice—tak nae nonsense frae any mither's son. Ye'll find the counter-jumpers o' the sooth a michty perky set till ye show them ye ken how to put a nose oot o' joint. Man, I've sportit the iron bracelets for disfigurin' a blusterin' blellum that was for tellin' me what nae gentleman should hear. Am kind o' lowlan' in the tongue," with an air of apology, "but am as Hielant in the hert as Schiehallion, and the neive was oot afore I had time to think. I mind it as weel as I mind my mither's face, God be good to her soul. 'A monstrous bad case,' says the bailie when the time came for settlement. 'A monstrous bad case; fifteen shillings or seven days with hard labour.' 'Seven days,

if ye please, bailie,' says I, for ye see I wis nae owre-burdened wi' cash in thae days, and that was the cheapest road hame. 'As you wish,' says he, 'and if ever I set eyes on you here again as sure's yer a drunken fechtin' rascal I'll make it fourteen.' 'Yer grand and free o' promises,' says I, 'but isnae that just a thocht extravagant?' Ye should hae seen the look browsy gae me. 'You want it doubled for contempt o' court,' says he. 'Faith, there ye mistake me, bailie,' says I. 'Ye never met a man less greedy o' sic favours than yer humble servant.' He lookit doon at me in a queer smirkin' kind o' way, and I says to mysel, 'My lad, I've converted you.' 'I can see yer a man o' great sense,' says he. 'Seven days for assault and battery' (I had just knockit a tooth or two doon a man's throat), 'seven days for assault and battery and fourteen for contempt, making a'thegither,' and he smirked again, 'twenty-one days. Ye'll be able to do something useful in that time,' says he, 'and ye'll hae besides an orra hour for meditation.' Pictir to yerself the scunner I got. I could hae nailed the red-nebbit pock-puddin' where he sat grinnin', only he noddit, and twa bobbies grippit me and begood to haul. 'As this is no place o' public debate,' says he, 'we'll excuse yer further observations. It would be ill manners to keep other veesitors waitin'.' And the next thing I kent I was clinkin' doon stane stairs three steps at a time."

"And how did you like it?" inquired Evan.

"Oh! just betwixt and between, as Davie danced," replied Lauchie. "The lodgin' was weel enough maybe for a man o' my persuasion, but the feedin' was clean rideeculous, and nae drink ava. When fat-wamed bailies tak' to clappin' folk in quod for the fun o' the thing they should see to the proveesions."

"I always wondered where you got your abstemious habits," remarked Mr. Proudfoot.

"Ye've the sweetest tongue in yer head, dominie," said Lauchie. "Jeel and honey's naething to it. But there, there, am no for slashin' a het haggis," noticing an ominous expression in the master's face. "God, I widna quarrel wi' ye for a' Strath Tay. Am ready to creep into my shell as meek as Moses, only I thocht it fair to put the laddie on his guard."

"You've the veteran sinner's fellow-feeling for the beginner," said the dominie, making a mock obeisance. "To



give away the jewel experience which you purchased at such infinite rate, as the player has it, is an act of infinite kindness."

"Dinna mention it," put in Lauchie, almost blushing. "I declare to ye on my honour it's naething, naethin' ava; no worth a blaw o' yer breath."

"It's worth a great deal more," persisted the dominie. "If every man who has felt ginger hot in the mouth were half as free and generous towards the innocent and ignorant there would be fewer kirks and better sermons. Doubtless our young friend will be warned, will note and ponder, and, remembering the voice of wisdom, give a wide berth to paunchy red-nebbit bailies. But should he trip (and Heaven alone knows how easy it is for the best of us to fall into misfortune), your advice and the apt and happy illustration with which it has been pointed out cannot but prove salutary."

"Hear him," cried Lauchie, "just hear him! Was there ever sic an unchancy man since Cain pickit a quarrel wi' his brother? Ye daurna say boo but he's at your throat like a whittrick. But by all that's holy I'll see him in Abraham's bosom or I fence wi' him. If he doesna ken a freend when he sees him, I do."

"You do me too much honour, Mr. Duff," returned the dominie with an odd twinkle in his half-closed eyes. "To be the friend of a man like yourself is a distinction that embarrasses me. You should have declared your regard sooner."

"By the mither o' Moses, that's good now," ejaculated Lauchie. "Declared it sooner! As sure's death that's fit to gar a body lauch till he greets. Ye'll no mind the tantrum on the road that moonlight night when ye raked up yer wickedest lang'ige; ye'll no mind how ye gave me my head in my hand for callin' ye a freend."

"My memory's something of the worst at times," replied the dominie in dulcet tones. "And it's a risky thing to call any man friend. You were giving me too much credit."

"And for that mista'en kindness," said Lauchie, with a lurid gleam in his eye, "you gave me the roughest bit o' the roughest tongue that ever waggit inside a human skull. A carbuncled suck-the-spigot—that was the best word ye had to fling at me. Pitweem here can bear me oot. Man, if I had been just twenty years younger that night——"

"You'd have been just twenty years younger," was the unruffled answer. "That 'if' is a sore stile for your lame dog. You wouldn't believe how many gallant fellows it has baulked, how many pretty plans it has spoilt."

"A' I ken or care," responded Lauchie, bent on his private grievance, "is that my feelin's werena the better o't a' that night."

"I had no notion they were so tender," remarked the dominie sympathetically. "One would have thought they'd stand the wear and tear better by this time; though, indeed, the truth is whiles extremely painful. But, not to pursue an unpleasant subject—an enterprise wholly unnecessary in this agreeable world—I was in a swither about venturing to interrupt your excellent farewell discourse with some poor words of my own."

Lauchie instantly melted.

"Am done," he said, with a chivalrous sweep of his bow to indicate restored affection. "Am quite feenished."

"Glorious Cæsar, how beautiful is condescension!" observed the dominie politely. "Few oracles, I assure you, would be so obliging. Well! you shall see the force of good example. My speech shall be so brief that, unless proverbs lie, it'll come within an ace of being witty. *Verbum sat sapienti*," he went on, turning to Evan. "And first let me say as a matter of prime consequence that when you're in the thick of examinations keep cool. The student who gets flustered might just as well jump off the Castle rock at once; it would save time and heartbreak."

"That's richt," interjected Lauchie with a nod of profound conviction. "That's perfeckly richt."

"Don't be overawed by professors and examiners," continued Mr. Proudfoot, ignoring the interruption. "They're but men after all, and, truth to tell, not always of the finest materials either."

"Richt again," broke in Lauchie. "Richt again. Man, I——"

"In the words of his worship of the crimson neb, we'll excuse your further observations, Mr. Duff," said the dominie.

"Am no' wantin' to pick a quarrel," answered Lauchie quickly. "Am in my shell."

"Wise to salvation," returned the dominie. "There is but one thing more I can suggest. If, having discreetly got into



its shell, the snail would curl up and be dumb, the favour would be complete."

"Hasna he got the bonnie simeelitudes though!" cried Lauchie. "Weel! the Lord be thankit, naething on twa feet was ever less fashed wi' a quarrelsome speerit than Lauchlan Duff—widna say boo to a goose; and it's to be hoped that same will be put doon to his credit abune. Drive on, dominie."

Mr. Proudfoot bowed elaborately, as if words could not express his gratitude.

"Mr. Duff being so very gracious," he resumed, addressing himself once more to Evan, "I want you to listen with all your ears. The importance of the matter will probably justify the attention. You can take your degree in three years without casting your coat to the business. But hark ye, you're not to do it; you're not to think of it; you're not to give the idea refuge for one half-second. Four years—that's your time. Four years and first-class honours: no mere passes, please. No cramming, no congestion, learning at a dead heat to-day what you'll forget with a raving headache to-morrow. That way lies disaster. You're in a hurry to get through? Well! just sit down on your hurry. You'll find it a most wholesome and profitable exercise. Of the spur I need not speak. That's not needed. Rather would I say ca' canny. For all I'm a dominie, there's not an honour in Edinburgh University that's worth a brain fever. The superstition that whom the gods love die young is musty and out of fashion. Don't for the sake of a pretty and pathetic epitaph quench a light which no skill can relume. Gravestone eulogies are interesting to friends, but they yield 'the poor inhabitant below' mighty cold comfort. In the grammar of life the great verbs are To be and To do. The others are barely worth conjugating. The picture of the white-faced scholar dying as he grasps the prize has been drawn *ad nauseam*. It's the facile means by which gushy poets and story-tellers and moralists pump the tears of old wives of both sexes. Be not deceived; it's the sound brain and the braced nerve that govern the world. Keep your independence as the jewel of your soul. Stand squarely on your own two feet; they were bestowed for that purpose. But do not fling a fiery heel at every gnat that buzzes. God made insects, and we must try to put up with them. *Compesce mentem.* Horace knew what an incendiary is the law-



less temper. And mind another wise man's injunction about measure, balance, patience. When there's trouble in Edinburgh I cannot come to the rescue in your uncle's boneshaker. And beware of the seductions of the city. When the siren gets too musical, clap cotton in the ears. Better be deaf than in the gutter. Mind, too, we're here watching you; do not disappoint us. We're getting old, and like to shine by reflected light. Should you come across any of my friends, say I taught you; that'll be message enough. If the Professor of Humanity asks questions, you know what to answer. You'll write me how you're getting on. And for the rest, my laddie, for the rest, your father's God keep and prosper you."

He rose abruptly, gave Evan's hand a terrific wring, and without a word to the others, vanished.

"Fair overcome," said Neil, with a long breath.

"A wee thocht gien to intemperance," remarked the sober Lauchie, "and owre fond o' dribblin' Greek and Hebrew. Otherwise no a bad body ava."

"There does not breathe this night a nobler-hearted man," said Evan emphatically.

"Hear, hear!" rejoined Lauchie. "Me and him's grand freends. Ye mind that night by the roadside, Pitweem, that ye were sae feared o' the bogles? Man, it makes me dry just to thing o't."

"And I'm sorry there's nothing stronger than tea in the house," said Jessie, taking the hint.

"Aweel," answered Lauchie resignedly. "I suppose I maun be content wi' that. A change-hoose at ilka corner is mair than can reasonably be expectit."

While Lauchie was quenching his thirst and, incidentally as it were, appeasing his hunger, Neil took occasion to remind Evan they were waiting and ready to be proud of him; and Lisspeth, watching her chance, transferred a parcel, which had bulged like a camel's hump all evening under her apron, into Jessie's hand.

"Pack it in his kist," she whispered in Gaelic. "It will mind him of home." It contained a roll of fresh butter, a jar of honey, two pairs of socks of her own knitting, and half-a-dozen rosy apples as big as turnips.

As soon as the visitors were gone, Evan was posted off to bed; but his father and sister remained together, talking and arranging, and knew nothing of the flight of time till the

cocks were heralding the dawn. Evan's trunk was examined for the twentieth time to make sure he lacked nothing they could supply. The new suit he was to wear on the morrow was hung as carefully on a chair-back as if it were made of veritable cloth of gold and would be ruined by a wrong crease, the smart city hat being perched above, and the light elastic-sided boots, speckless and shining as Jessie's eager hands could make them, placed at the chair-foot. They had all been bought in Aberfourie—the first apparel Evan had ever got in that centre of fashionable outfitters, and Jessie spoke joyously of the appearance he should make in the metropolis.

His second best suit, the suit in which he was to do all his studying, was also re-brushed, re-folded, and patted as if it were a sentient thing. Then the ties, the handkerchiefs, collars, and other minor articles of the oufit were smoothed, rearranged and blown upon, lest any vagrant speck of dust should mar their shining purity.

"Well! there it is, then," observed Jessie, when she had replaced the last article in the trunk and given it the final pat and touch of adjustment. "There it is, and thanks to nobody."

"I will not let you say that," replied David in a quivering voice. "Thanks to you, Jessie, thanks to you, my lassie. It is there and paid for because you skrimped yourself, because you slaved night and day for it."

"It would be a fine thing to think upon all the rest of our days," she retorted cheerily, "if we allowed him to break his prize money, and borrowing has never been the way of the Kinlochs. As for pinching myself," she went on, laughing in her father's face, "fuich, I have more new dresses than I can wear in twenty years." And the Recording Angel must have winked approvingly at the monstrous fib.

"If Evan does not mind all this, shame be upon him," said David.

"I am willing to trust him," answered Jessie. "For it runs in my head he's got the best of memories. I never knew his heart to fail yet. And, you see, if we don't do something for him now we may never have the chance again. You wait and see if the bread we are casting upon the waters will not come back to us."

David gulped the lump in his throat and was silent.

In addition to the clothes and the varied miscellany of

provisions— jam, honey, butter, scone, oat-cake, hazel nuts, apples, and, just for the piquant country flavour of them, a pocketful of sloes—there was packed in a safe corner of the trunk a little purse of sovereigns, saved Heaven and Jessie alone knew how. Yet more precious was the Bible wrapped in tissue paper and bearing a double inscription by the givers. In David's tremulous hand was written very closely "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them, while the sun or the light or the moon or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.*" Jessie wrote more firmly; "*And she said, He is my brother.*"

But the most precious treasure of all was the little devotional volume in which Evan's name had been put ten years before. It also was tenderly wrapped and deposited beside the Bible. Neither spoke of the faded words it bore, but when David saw Jessie bending her wet face over the writing he had to turn quickly away, for it does not beseem a man to weep aloud. But as he stood trying to control himself he thought much. What would she who slept in the little kirkyard say if she knew what was going on? Once on a summer's evening in the long ago, when some one spoke casually of fame and learning, she fondled his hair and looked into his laughing eyes, murmuring wistfully, rather to herself than to those about her, that her boy, her bright, babbling, toddling, mischievous Evan, might one day go to college and learn and astonish them all; and lo! what she dreamed was coming to pass, but she was not there to rejoice.

Not there to rejoice! David checked himself with a shuddering sense of impiety. Who dared to hint that those who go early no more remember the dear ones left behind? Who had the brazen infidelity to scoff at the notion of unseen presences—the quick, deep, sympathetic joy or sorrow of unseen visitants? What insensible fool had said that the grave is a fixed impassable gulf? Impassable! Oh, poor, ignorant, defrauded bankrupt simpleton that hast never known the immortal might and mystery of love. David was wiser than a multitude of sceptics. In that very moment did he not feel the impalpable presence from above, the gracious stooping of the divine to the human? Had his heart not leaped up to meet her? was his whole being not

vibrating in response to her yearning? Yes, surely she was with them, watching over her boy, and would go forth with him rejoicing.

David turned back abruptly to Jessie.

"You'll go to bed now, Jessie, and have a little sleep," he said in a quavering treble, "I want to have a smoke." And she kissed him and went without a word.

Taking a chair by the dying embers of a peat fire, he stirred them, an act of unconsciousness done in stress of feeling and from mere habit.

Presently he scooped some of the glowing ash into the bowl of his pipe and pulled spasmodically; then again he took up the tongs and stirred, and his hand was shaking violently. Laying the tongs aside and resting his elbows on his knees, he leaned forward with a rapt, far-away expression until the heat crimsoned his face. When he recollected himself his pipe was cold. Putting it in his pocket he rose quietly, turned down the lamp-wick, and went forth into the pulseless night. It was still black, but the solemn hush had the subtle intimations of life which betoken an awakening world, and he knew that day was at hand.

He had not long to wait for its coming. The stragglers of the starry host faded quickly as he climbed the little hill above the house, the air was chill with the peculiar penetrating chilliness of the dawn, and presently a peak caught a ruddy gleam of gold. Quickening his step, he climbed another and higher hill, and then at once a great shaft of brightness smote the pitchy vault, which seemed to dissolve in flying fragments. It was as if the black cap of night were torn by a prodigious explosion. A beam of rosy light touched David as he stood solitary on the crest, setting him off in Titanic proportions against the darksome background of the west. For a moment he remained with face upturned as in adoration; then dived among the shadows.

When he returned indoors Jessie had the fire blazing and the kettle singing cheerily. In a little while Evan, who slept as if parting were unknown in this world, was roused for breakfast, and he was the only one who ate at all.

An hour later Neil was at the door with "the machine," and the entire household rode off to Logieburn Station in a flood of pearly sunshine. To their astonishment they found the dominie waiting for them on the platform, with a parcel neatly wrapped in brown paper under his arm.



"It is the Liddell and Scott lexicon," he said, almost throwing it at Evan. "I thought never to part with it, but I know you'll use it well; and my day is over."

CHAPTER XIII

In Edinburgh the expected happened. The Professors of the Faculty of Arts certified, not without surprise, that having shown surpassing proficiency in Humanity, Greek, and Mathematics, Evan Kinloch, Pitweem, Perthshire, was admitted at once to the higher classes in these subjects; so that he was at liberty (if he chose) to complete the curriculum for the degree of Master of Arts in three winter sessions instead of the customary four.

A bursary of fifty pounds fell to the young Cameronian, and he would have taken a score more but for the restrictions that mercifully gave mediocrity a chance.

These distinctions, in which he stood alone, immediately marked him for observation and criticism. There were jealousy, mutterings, and envious looks, but there were also honest admiration and good-will. Some of the more generous or less ambitious of his fellow-students walked deliberately round the hero of the hour, heads tilted to the side, faces astutely screwed, as if to note and examine his points, and remarked succinctly that he was a devil. He answered genially that he hoped they would find him a pleasant devil, and the bond of brotherhood was established.

To the folks at home the tidings brought a wild shock of joy which was almost disastrous. It was as if the air had suddenly been electrified to a pitch that caused tumultuous thrillings and odd uncontrollable fits of exaltation. The dominie, having the liveliest appreciation of Evan's achievement, was naturally most affected.

"Just think of it," he would cry, breaking out in the midst of commonplace conversation. "Just think of it. Triple honours, jumping the junior classes in the three principal subjects, and the flower of the big schools against him too, the fellows who sucked learning with their mother's milk, who were hard at it when he was herding kye and trying to break his neck galloping bare-back on horses—the

rascal! God, it's grand, it's grand. And mark me," he would add warningly, "it's but the beginning, just the beginning. What the end will be I'm clean afraid to think."

There came a brief note from Evan to Mr. Proudfoot full of thanks and gratitude, and modestly attributing the success to the skill and devotion of the teacher; and as the dominie read it over and over again the scholars wondered what ailed him that he looked so like greetin'. Detecting their furtive watchings and whisperings, he vowed he would treat the whole school to a dose of the black ruler if they dared to lift their eyes off their lesson-books. They instantly became studious, and he fell back on his letter and the lost scholar.

He easily pictured to himself the whole stirring scene in Edinburgh. He saw disappointed students gaping at Evan half in envy, half in awe, and stooping, wrinkled, long-haired, pre-occupied professors, who could not tell Sandy from Jock for their precious lives, peering curiously over their gold-rimmed spectacles with odd ideas about a novel importation from the heather. "As sure's they're alive they'll have a great deal more to stare and wonder at before all's done," thought the dominie in an ecstasy. And he was precisely right alike in regard to the present and the future.

"Are your father and mother both Highland?" demanded the Professor of Humanity one day abruptly and irrelevantly. He cultivated eccentricity and had reason to plume himself on a conspicuous success.

"Purely Celtic, sir," answered Evan.

"Then," said the Professor, who had preconceptions without the corrective of universal knowledge, "then, sir, you certainly ought to be lank, red-haired, freckled, hard-featured, raw-boned, and furnished with the teeth of a horse."

Assuredly Evan did not correspond to this enlightened notion of the Celt. He was not lank, nor red-haired, nor freckled, nor raw-boned, nor furnished with the teeth of a horse. On the contrary, he was dark and rather slim; not tall, but remarkably supple and well knit, with mobile, clean-cut features, luminous, steadfast, dark brown eyes; a mouth that could shut like a steel trap, and a Napoleonic head perfectly poised upon resolute shoulders. In fact, it was in the Professor's mind that here was the picture of the young Napoleon over again, and though not of a worldly spirit he remembered the three daughters that were among his house-



hold chattels in George Square. In fairness to disinterested scholarship let us hasten to add that this was but a passing thought, say one of the flitting frivolous fancies that visit us unbidden amidst the gravest business.

"Did the Rector of Aberfourie Academy teach you your Humanities, my boy?" inquired the Professor, returning to earth.

"No, sir," replied Evan, "he taught me mathematics. Mr. Proudfoot, of Burnside School, taught me classics."

"Burnside, Burnside?" repeated the Professor, as if trying to recall the name. "I never heard of it before. Does it turn out many scholars like you?"

Evan responded with a smile; but he seized the opportunity to state that on a certain year Mr. Peter Proudfoot's name might be found in the University Calendar as prizeman and medallist.

The Professor found it forthwith, and found at the same time something else which took his breath away; for while the name of Peter Proudfoot stood first in the list of honours, his own stood second. "Great Heavens!" he cried excitedly, adjusting his spectacles to make sure he read aright, "you don't mean to tell me that *this* Peter Proudfoot is the Peter Proudfoot who taught you. I thought he was dead and buried long ago; yes, I certainly understood he was dead. Good Lord, laddie, do you know what this means? It means that you have come here from a man who could instruct the half of us, and kick the other half into the outer darkness of shame. You see what he did, but only those who competed with him know how he did it. Peter Proudfoot, sir, seemed predestined for all that is high and brilliant. He took prizes as Cæsar made conquests, by the very decree of Fate. I speak feelingly, for he gave me the soundest drubbing I ever had from mortal. In the classes he just did what he liked, and in the final heat he was out of sight when I was peching my heart out for second place. I question, sir, if Edinburgh University has seen his match for half a century. Does he still recite Homer?"

"Yes, sir."

"And miscall Virgil?"

"Occasionally, sir."

"The same old heretic," exclaimed the Professor. "He is wrong about Virgil, sir, as I hope to prove to you; and yet, confound him! he worsted me at my own game. I have the

tang of his Latin prose in my mouth yet. As for Greek, and especially Homer, he was *facile princeps;* none durst dispute with him there. While he was about the rest of us might think of second place, but never of first. He nestled, sir, actually nestled in Homer's brain, to use the phrase of a great man of to-day. When we were fretted and feverish over syntax, hurting our teeth like so many apes with husks and outer shells, he was quietly at the kernel. How he reached it was always a baffling question; but there he was, serene as one of his own Hellenic gods; his very serenity was tantalising. If ever there was a case in which learning was an instinct that case was Peter Proudfoot's. And you tell me he is lost in a little country school in the Highlands, one room, perhaps, and tumble-down at that. God bless us all! I must hear more of this; come and dine with me to-night. This is a bomb indeed."

Evan went and dined, and, what is more, saw the Professor's three lovely daughters decked in their elegant draperies and fine city manners; and the Professor's wife, who was motherly and rather careworn. He learned for the first time what it was to be made a whetstone for feminine wits, and how hard it is to keep the head cool with three pairs of slyly coquettish eyes spying upon the secrets of the heart. He got through the ordeal with credit enough to be discussed afterwards in the laughing piquant style which young ladies adopt to dissemble sentimental interest.

At the dinner-table, however, the ruling topic was the dominie, and Evan did not withhold his golden opinions.

"I want to ask you a plain question," said the Professor, suddenly drawing himself up very straight, and holding knife and fork as if preparing to receive cavalry. "Does the bottle play a part in his life?"

"Not to the extent it did, sir," answered Evan.

"I am very glad to hear that," said the Professor, lowering his knife and fork. "I am very glad indeed to hear it. And that school of his—what is it you call it? Brookside, Riverside—ah! yes to be sure, to be sure, Burnside. Gothic brunna, Anglo-Saxon burna: curious how the great process of borrowing and appropriating goes on. Nothing Celtic in it, you see, nothing whatever, though there may be a strain of Icelandic. And this Burnside, what is it?"

Evan gave the desired information as concisely as possible.

"God bless me!" exclaimed the Professor, swallowing a piece of meat in such haste that the Chair of Humanity nearly lost its illustrious occupant. "Upon my soul, this is a queer world, an astonishingly queer world. Do you credit the theory that our planet is a mere flake thrown off by some other planet and developed according to the laws of evolution? I'm sure I don't know. The matter lies outside my province; but it's a queer world, a most unaccountable world, which the Humanities, I am bound to say, leave unexplained. Without doubt we are fearfully and wonderfully made; that is about the extent of our knowledge My friend, the Professor of Anatomy, says that if we could only see our own skeletons we'd straightway die of vexation. Maybe, but what about the skeleton of the mind? There's the puzzle; that's the *pons asinorum* of your metaphysicians and philosophers. But we're getting into drumlie water. To return to Brookside—tut, tut! I mean Burnside. I suppose it has a thatched roof in which sparrows propagate their evil kind, and the scholars are barefooted, and——"

"Oh, papa," cried the three sisters in chorus, "you forget that Mr. Kinloch was there."

"My dears, such an interruption is wholly *contra bonos mores*. What if Mr. Kinloch was there? The eagle and the hare inhabit the same hills, but I have never found them classed together by naturalists. I was going to observe, Mr. Kinloch, that the material upon which Mr. Peter Proudfoot works cannot in the nature of things be very promising."

"As a rule, it is the reverse, sir."

"As a rule," repeated the Professor with a bow. "As a rule—a most prudent generalisation implying exceptions, as is right. And the exceptions are invariably important, invariably. Many a clever fellow comes to grief by forgetting the exceptions. And there has been a conspicuous exception, I think, in Mr. Proudfoot's experience," bowing again. "Well, well! I little thought this morning such intelligence was coming to me from the glens. Poor Proudfoot, our once brilliant and admired Proudfoot! What a lesson is there, Mr. Kinloch. Parts and attainments fit for anything, and to think what they have led to. Lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen! Does he ever complain?"

"Never, sir," answered Evan.

"Pride, sir, pride," said the Professor. "I know him: he'd rather cut his tongue out than whine. The whole thing is

tragic, with an Æschylean tragicness. *Sunt lachrymæ rerum.*"

"What has he done?" inquired the young ladies.

"Done?" echoed their father. "Why, he did a very crushing thing—he took all the prizes on which the Professor of Humanity in Edinburgh University had set his heart; took them, too, as it were in a kind of holiday frolic. That was the rub. It was Samson walking off with the gates of Gaza just for the fun of the thing. But alas! he met Delilah by the way, turned aside, and was shorn of his locks of power. God preserve us from the women!"

"Oh!" cried the ladies all together.

"An exclamation has no force in logic, my dears," retorted the Professor. "I thought you would remember that. I say again: God save us from the women. You remember the saying of Metellus Numidicus. In the economy of Nature I suppose they're necessary, but——" The sentence was finished with a shake of the head more impressive than a hundred speeches.

The ladies, turning scarlet, declared the heresy unpardonable; but Evan, absorbed in the light cast upon a baffling mystery, did not observe the flush of confusion. Noting his inattention, they exchanged glances of intelligence and breathed again.

That night the Professor sent a long letter to Burnside School, recalling the time when two grizzled men chased illusive meanings in dead languages, compared notes, and heard the midnight chimes together. The sedate man of learning was back among the cakes and ale again, and wondrously sweet they tasted. There were such messages of remembrance and inquiry as would not hurt a proud man; there was also an inevitable reference to Evan.

"You have sent us a promising scholar," were the words. "But he was taught by a man of genius. You will allow me to make the affirmation out of the fulness of knowledge and sincerity."

The letter reached Burnside in the middle of the afternoon, and, upon reading the first paragraph and glancing at the signature, the master suddenly called out, "Children, you can go and play;" and so anxious was he to promote their happiness, that he locked the door hard on the heels of the last disappearing urchin, lest by any chance they should think of returning to their studies. A little later, some of the



more daring boys, venturing to peep through a window, saw the master striding up and down the room with an open letter in his hand and signs of extreme agitation in his face.

"Some of his folks dead, likely," they remarked astutely; and understanding intuitively that lessons were over for the day, they went off whooping to organise a fox hunt.

In the evening the dominie called upon David.

"See what he's done," cried Mr. Proudfoot, before his foot was well across the threshold, "just see what the rascal's done. A letter from the Professor of Humanity. He's made a ship of the line dip the flag to this battered old craft. David, it touches me; it touches me in my tenderest spot. There, read it."

Taking the letter David made a pretence of deciphering the erudite calligraphy of the Professor; then, without comment, he turned to the dresser shelf for one he had himself received that day.

"This is from Evan," he explained in a queer quiet voice, opening the envelope with shaky fingers; "and he says he owes everything to his old teachers, and names you, Mr. Proudfoot, particularly."

"It's like him to lie that way," returned the excited dominie. "Don't believe a word of it. David, you've dropped something."

The dominie picked up a slip of paper which had fluttered to the floor, turning extraordinarily red in the face from so slight an exertion.

"Read it," said David, hardly able to speak. "Read it. See what it is." And Jessie, unable to resist the spell, drew near holding her breath.

"This," said the dominie after a critical examination, "is a bank draft, a bank draft for twenty pounds."

"It's a present," said David, almost choking. "Tell him about it, Jessie."

"It's out of his prize money," explained Jessie. "We didn't know how he was to be kept at college, and he settles the thing by keeping us. See what he says yourself, sir."

"David Kinloch," said the dominie solemnly when he had read the letter, "thank God for such a son, and I will say grace for such a scholar. He's a blessing to you; he's an honour to me. He's had his scrapes, and likely he'll have more; but I'd like to clap my eyes on the enemy who would say a word against him. God prosper him! and He will;

never doubt it. Now you'll not mind my going in a hurry. I've others to see."

"You will wait and have a cup of tea, Mr. Proudfoot," said Jessie, rushing to a cupboard for the teapot; but he had waved his hand and was gone before the sentence was complete.

Five minutes later he was in Pitweem stable, talking vehemently to Neil about matters bearing no relation whatever to horses. His face shone with a kind of angelic light; but his words were fierce and were hurled at such as knew not how to appreciate gifted nephews.

"We will just pe going inside, then, and drink the laddie's health," observed Neil by way of commentary and reply, and he smirked as he thought of his own perspicacity.

"In what?" demanded the dominie.

"Oh, I think there will pe something left in the plack pottle yet," said Neil, smirking again. But the smirk changed to amazement at the dominie's response.

"That may suit you," he said; "but as for me, I am drunk already on a diviner drink that was ever brewed in Highland still, and I'm not going to mix liquors. The gods, ay, the gods of my youth, have filled my cup to overflowing with something rarer than nectar. Man, Pitweem, you'd give a thousand pounds of the dross you sell your soul for to have my feelings this minute."

"Ay?" said Pitweem, lifting his eyebrows as if to inquire what sort of a joke this might be; "ay? and how will that pe?"

"To tell you would be as fit as to whisper a love tale in the hairy ear of the first jackass I meet," returned the dominie. "The horologe of time has swept back thirty years this night. Can you understand that?"

"Am no sure," rejoined Neil.

"I wish I were half as sure of salvation as I am of your state of mind," said the dominie. "The point's as clear to you as the moon to a blind man. The Theban son of Jupiter knew how to clean a stable without polluting his fingers. You'll have heard of that?"

"I will not pe sure that I have," said Neil. "What kind of a hoe did he use?"

"Faith, they say nothing less than the clouds," answered the dominie.

"None of your colly-foxing, dominie," cried Neil.

"As the gods live, you'll get hanged for your wit some day," said the dominie. "Come along the road and we'll have a talk."

In the course of that walk Neil learned things that made his eyes start and dilate, tales of city life and college escapades, of splendid triumphs and unimagined wickedness, of the glory of the ancients, and the possession that is above riches. The master talked Homer and Horace to the total exclusion of crops and prices, and swooped at one lightning bound from Achilles to Evan. Then Neil heard in plain language what he owed to Heaven in being selected of all the human race to be uncle to such a boy.

"And you would put him to muck byres and break clods," exclaimed the enraptured dominie. "Oh, Bœotia, my country Bœotia! Oh, Bottom, great wise Bottom!"

Neil retraced his steps pondering on two strange things: one that the dominie had refused whisky, the other that he had spoken of his youth.

"I'm thinking," remarked Neil to Lisspeth in the confidential chat with which they commonly closed the day, "I'm thinking that Evan has put the dominie clean gyte."

If a man be gyte when he is whirled into the highest heaven of exaltation Neil was right; for Peter Proudfoot was not the unconsidered dominie of Burnside that night, but the brilliant medallist, the best classic of his year, nay, of many years, the admired and envied of scholars of distinction. When the head is among the stars it is apt to be rather light.

Towards midnight he sat down to answer the Professor's letter; in truth, to write the first word he had sent to a scholar of repute in twenty years. And as the pen flew in obedience to the bounding heart, the shabby room became a second Mount of Transfiguration. The present and all its shameful defilements fell from him like a dishonoured mantle, and the old Peter Proudfoot shone forth, the Peter Proudfoot who had received so much applause, had had so many chances of celebrity. For one glorious hour of renewed youth his perpetual nightmare fled. The haunting thoughts of what he might have been did not once vex him; he did not once remember that the applause had turned to bitterness, and the chances been cast irrevocably away; that as he would himself have said, the gods had shown him their backs in anger. The spring mood had returned; the spring

music was in his ears; the spring sunshine and sap surged and raced in his veins; his whole being was one exultant pulse.

He had a fine face not yet wholly marred by drink and the devil, and so marvellous was its rejuvenation, so radiant its likeness to what it had been before the evil days came, that his mother, entering to bid him good-night, marked the change with a kind of awe. But a little later, had he chanced to be less preoccupied, he might have heard the lonely woman pouring out her soul in gratitude to her Maker because her Peter, her still beloved son, was turning over a new leaf.

He was turning over many leaves—backward, and each leaf had a diviner potency of intoxication than the last. An æronaut triumphantly cleaving the upper air might know something of his feeling, but the plain pedestrian never.

When he was in the middle of his letter, and his rapture was at its height, the soft scraping of a fiddle beneath the window made him pause in sudden, savage irritation. Lauchie Duff, scouring the country for supper and a bed, had spied the light, and, arguing that the dominie must have something exceptionally good on hand, turned gaily aside to share it. But the response to the fraternal signal for admittance disturbed his serene confidence. Springing from his seat and throwing up the sash, Mr. Proudfoot looked angrily upon the swaying figure in the moonlight.

"I cannot let you in to-night, Lauchie," he said brusquely.

"Eh, what's that?" asked Lauchie, flinging back his head in astonishment.

"I cannot let you in," repeated the master.

"That's news," observed Lauchie, staggering as he tried to look up. "Ay fegs, that's winderfu' eentelligence. What's happened that ye look doon on auld freends in sic a way? My certie, but times is changin'. Somebody left ye a fortune, eh? I would warn ye, dominie, against the pride o' riches. They take up their feet and run. Scriptir says it."

"I have been left no fortune," returned the master.

"Then ye dinna surely mean to tell me thae teetotal fowk hae been gettin' roond ye! Are ye converted, dominie?"

"I don't know," said the dominie impatiently; "I think so."

"Dod sake, this is serious," remarked Lauchie.

"Now please go away," pleaded the master; "another

night you'll come in and have a crack and something else, but not to-night."

"Ay, nae doot it's a' richt," rejoined Lauchie. "Anither nicht! Oh, it's michty grand and fine, as the horse said when it got the chaff for corn. But who's goin' to gie Lauchie the something else this night, and where's he goin' to sleep? That's the question afore the meetin' the now."

"I'm very busy," said the dominie hotly. "I cannot waste time and temper over you." And he shut the window with a bang.

"As sure's death that's braw treatment from a man's freends now," said Lauchie to himself. "Well! We'll just hae a bit tune till oorselves; maybe that'll bring the converted back to their senses."

Slipping to the wall foot he screwed up the old fiddle, and next minute there was a hideous din as of ten thousand cats clawing each other to pieces.

The window went up with a rattle, and a furious voice demanded instant silence.

"I thocht ye liked lively music," said Lauchie, innocently. "If I am mista'en I'll gie ye 'Home, Sweet Home.' "

"If you draw the bow across those infernal strings again," cried the dominie, "I'll go down and fling you in the burn head foremost."

"That would be ill done to a man sae reasonable as me," argued Lauchie, struggling to his feet. "Am sure am no askin' much—a bite, a sup, and a bench to sleep on."

There was a moment's silence, as if the man above were considering.

"If I let you in will you keep quiet?" he asked then.

"As mum's a red-herrin' afore the fire," answered Lauchie.

The dominie descended, unbolted the door, and catching the fiddler by the shoulder, dragged rather than led him to the kitchen.

"There," said Mr. Proudfoot, handing his guest half a loaf and a jug of milk, "eat that; and when you've eaten, lie down on that settle. If you disturb me again, as sure's the sky's above us, I'll kill you."

In the glimmering light of the candle Lauchie noted the strange expression in Mr. Proudfoot's face, and he afterwards said that in all his experience he had never seen the dominie so abominably drunk.

Totally unconscious, or for that matter totally regardless of the impression he produced, Mr. Proudfoot returned to his writing, and immediately forgot the interruption. The fiery glow of feeling seemed intensified; thoughts thronged, if possible, hotter and faster than before, and the pen sped without pause, for the pent-up emotion of five-and-twenty years was at last finding vent. At last he spoke unreservedly to a fellow-being who would understand him, and the impassioned, long-repressed heart swelling into flood disdained alike restraint and stint.

The concluding paragraph referred to Evan, and it contained a veiled prophecy. "You and I," said the writer, "may fairly consider we know something about college honours, yet it is possible we shall find ourselves amazed at the doings of some of our later successors. Keep an eye on our young Alexander. It may seem vain to speak of promise; assuredly, in one who knows aught of the world, it is rash to indulge in prophecy, and I am not going to rant, that you, my old friend, may laugh at my fatuity. Yet this much I will hazard, that if the student who has gone hence to you does not do honour, not to my poor school, which is but a dry twig on the mighty tree of learning, but to your great university, which is world-renowned, I will mention erudition, dream of success, no more for ever. Yet I doubt whether scholarship will prove his forte. Were you to visit his native strath you would be startled by the wildest legends of his indocilities and audacities. I, however, comfort myself with the reflection that eagles, even when young, do not catch flies. If the tools are for him who can handle them, I will repose confidently in my hope in spite of the clatter of old wives. My judgment is gone from me, or a wider world than the scholastic will yet perforce take account of Evan Kinloch. So I love to think of him as our young Alexander. *Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio.*"

A fervent letter was likewise written to Mr. Dudley, and another to Mr. Sinclair. The last was not finished when the grey dawn was breaking upon the hills.

CHAPTER XIV

ACCORDING to his wont Evan toiled hard and said little. The ordinary examinations he passed in the ordinary course, to exercise his strength as the racer gallops to preserve tone. Class prizes came with almost prosaic regularity, and bursaries, won in open competition, filled the purse as often as restrictive regulations allowed.

Withal he found time for recreation, both physical and mental. He shone in the Athletic Club, devoting himself with particular enthusiasm to boxing and fencing; he fleshed his virgin rapier upon the gladiators of the Dialectic Society, and temerariously dropped bombs and hot shot among the wise ones of the Philosophic. In these intellectual gymnastics it was his humour to affect paradox and sarcasm, to deride Delphic and other oracles, and to treat venerable tradition with the cynical irreverence which sits so gracefully on the satiated pessimist of seventeen. Those who winced under his irony whispered of the worship of strange gods. To encourage them he ventured upon Hume and Voltaire, and then his fate was taken as sealed. "A budding *persifleur*" was the verdict "destined to perish miserably of his wit." Whereupon the modern Athens wagged its heavy head dismally, for it hates levity (having itself no gift that way), as it hates Satan, with all its honest heart and soul.

A friendly professor gave gentle admonition.

"You'll be going for the Kirk," he observed. "Well! are you quite sure you are taking the shortest road to grace and a pulpit? I wouldn't make too much of the wits and sceptics, if I were you. They are pleasant, clever fellows, but they don't get on in any church in Scotland. And when you come to think of it, men's souls are not saved by epigram and repartee."

The warning showed greater good-will than insight. Evan was in no danger of losing either head or feet among the quicksands. His salt of humour effectually preserved him from any taint of vanity or infatuation. None understood better than he precisely what and how much the mimic combats meant, and to himself, if not to others, there was a frank admission that he engaged in them not "to enlarge the un-

derstanding," nor "to cultivate the reason," nor "to gain the philosophic mind," nor in any way to approach the ideals of wisdom; but simply to give an edge to his sarcasm, to point and polish his wit, and, at all hazards, to have as much fun as possible.

But in the classroom and the solitude of his own bare lodging (for he preferred to study alone) he was another being. Banter and fire crackers went to the winds. It was known that, as the phrase ran, he was "a glutton for work"; but as he was taciturn respecting his private concerns, and declined to be pumped, few guessed how strenuously he bent his energies upon one predetermined aim, until, very quietly, one day towards the close of the third session, he deposited the necessary fees, notifying the clerk of the university that he intended to offer himself for a further examination with a view to graduation with honours, and naming the department of classical literature.

The dominie, who alone of the folks at home knew what was happening, was on tenterhooks. For this hour he had long been preparing; of this hour he had dreamed passionately at dead of night and lo! when it came he shook like a bride on her wedding day. He could not sleep, he scarce ate enough to sustain a wren, and it was with difficulty he refrained from going off hot-foot to Edinburgh. For a whole week the scholars did as they liked.

Then just as the fever of expectation became unbearable a messenger from Aberfourie Post-office appeared at Burnside School with a telegram marked "Immediate," an event never before known in the history of that seminary. Fortunately it came when the children were deep in their midday play; otherwise there would have been legends of tremulous hands, wild looks, and sudden delirium. The message was from the Professor of Humanity, and ran:

"Your young Alexander first prizeman and medallist Humanity and Greek. Latin prose superb. Highest class honours Mathematics, Philosophy, Logic, Rhetoric. *Artes honorabit.*"

The dominie seemed to whirl in a tumult of emotion, the roof flew upward, and he could have sworn the rickety three-legged desk spun into the centre of the floor in a jig of jubilation.

"My laddie," he cried shrilly, "my own clever laddie! First—first in both Greek and Humanity. I knew how it

would be; and yet, God forgive me, I was afraid when the pinch came. Oh, doubting Thomas! doubting Thomas!"

Sinking dizzily on a bench, he drew a long breath to still the furious beating of his heart and steady his whirling brain. When he had composed himself a little he read again, and this time with overflowing eyes: "Your young Alexander first prizeman and medallist Humanity and Greek. Latin prose superb."

He leaped to his feet holding the open telegram with both hands.

"Beaten them all!" he cried again. "All Edinburgh University; every mother's son of them; and he went from Burnside. God keep me from going clean daft!"

Chancing to look out he caught sight of the Pitweem folks yoking for the afternoon's labour at potato-planting. The next moment he had clapped on his bonnet and was through the door as if flying for dear life. He shouted at the pitch of his voice. The workers turned inquiringly, and at that he waved and shouted again.

"Gosh pless me, what will pe wrong with the dominie now?" said Neil.

"Maybe he has heard from Evan," suggested David, with the swift intuition of the heart.

Hearing that word Jessie must needs run to meet the master, but with an imperative gesture he waved her off.

"Lassie, you cannot understand," he told her almost angrily.

"Is it from Evan?" she demanded quickly.

"Not from him, but about him."

"Mr. Proudfoot, has anything happened to him?" she asked, turning a dead white.

"Yes," answered the dominie, "something tremendous has happened to him; but it's beyond your comprehension, quite."

He shot past her, and she fell in behind his flying coat-tails breathless and terrified. In another minute, however, he had reached the group and thrust the telegram into David's hand.

"Read that," he panted. "No, no; give it to me," snatching it back. "I'll read it myself." And in a strange piping voice, broken for want of wind, he read the Professor's message.

"That's your herd boy, Pitweem," he added savagely.

"That's your son, David, who couldn't take care of kye, but can beat all Edinburgh University. The best classic of his year—what am I saying?—the best of any year. I expected good tidings, but this makes the heart jump."

David turned away his face, pretending to tie a bootlace that was as hard and fast as fingers could make it; but Jessie, relieved of her fears, indulged in a cry of undisguised delight and pride.

"It will pe you that did it, dominie," said Neil, with a glowing face.

"Speak the truth, Pitweem," returned the dominie sharply. "For God's sake don't add lying to your other vices."

"Evan himself always says just the same as my uncle," put in Jessie, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron.

"Yes," said David, speaking with some difficulty; "and I am sure it iss true, too."

"Havers and nonsense," responded the dominie. "But never mind, there it is. I told him at the beginning that he was to put his name as prizeman in the calendar, and he's done it—put it at the very top. My Highland laddie's beaten them all! And he's not done yet; he's not done. Mark what the Professor adds: 'Highest class honours Mathematics, Logic, Rhetoric.' That means more distinctions. As sure's you live the end is not yet."

There came a note of Cæsarean brevity from the Conqueror himself, and within a month he was home for the vacation. They expected to see him thin, fagged, white-faced; they found him instead as lusty and rosy as if he were ending a long holiday.

"As I live, not a hair turned," observed the admiring dominie. "I'll be bound there were no wet towels about that head. Well, I'll never mention classics again in your presence."

"Then I'm afraid we shall cease to be friends, sir," rejoined Evan.

"That is a calamity I do not wish to happen as long as my life lasts," answered Mr. Proudfoot fervently. "If only for the sake of what's come and gone you'll not throw your old dominie overboard. You mind that day I told you to draw a line behind you? I confess that I was not without hopes, but this is clean beyond them. Now it seems as natural as sunshine. Well, you shall tell me all about it. You shall

reconstruct that old Edinburgh world which looms dimly on my horizon like the fading city of a dream, the 'baseless fabric of a vision.' We'll indulge ourselves in the poetic, the intangible; we'll e'en risk the scorn of devotees of the earthy and actual, like my super-excellent friend, Pitweem," nodding at Neil. "Ay, we'll get the balm of spruce woods and clover in our lungs and climb the braes and hills together, and ease our shanks among the summer heather, looking down on the glinting Tay and them that toil for a mess of pottage, and talk and talk and better talk. I'm famishing for such cracks."

And precisely thus the summer was passed. The battles of the examinations were fought over again, every notable feat or incident evoking a word of delight or caustic criticism from the eager dominie. The plights of students not formed for the halls of learning were described with a tart, tickling humour, and the Comic Muse, getting her head, made irreverently free with grave and reverend professors, whose academic airs and affectations, little tricks of countenance, of habit, gait, and speech, were mimicked with effects that sent the dominie into convulsions of merriment.

"Done to the nines," he would cry, wiping his eyes. "As good as a stage-play." And he would have this part and that repeated, slapping his leg the while and gurgling and exploding afresh.

Nor was there lacking higher entertainment or more illustrious company. Shades of divine Olympians, spirits of an indistinct antiquity, peopled the green and purple solitudes. The wise, the lovely, and brave of pagan Eld—gods and goddesses, heroes, heroines, wits, poets, sages—rained their alien influences on stern Presbyterian hills. And the sun shone, and the heather bloomed, and crops grew and ripened, and sheep were shorn to the blended music of bleating and barking, and bees and birds went about their business, humming and singing, and Time sped without any driving.

October brought fresh triumphs, but what heated Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Sinclair to their vitals was the frequent speculation about the final results in April.

"We mustn't expect too much, you know," said the Rector of Aberfourie Academy. "It's all but impossible to take a double first in Edinburgh."

"We'll wait patiently for the all but impossible," returned

Mr. Proudfoot. But secretly he trembled over the prospect. Perhaps he was hoping too much.

April came, the lists appeared, and again the telegraph flashed a thrilling message. This time it was to Mr. Sinclair, and ran:

"Kinloch first Mathematics. Swept the field. Broken record. University proud of him."

The Rector of Aberfourie Academy was a product of the high science which chokes emotion out of existence. Neither teacher nor scholar could boast of ever having seen him sensibly moved: to imagine him giving way to excitement would be as if one pictured a marble statue splitting its sides in merriment or a bronze bursting its cheeks with rage.

But after that day another tale was told. Flourishing the message in his right hand, he ran through the school crying out the news, and having sent assistants and pupils into a sudden fever, he remembered Dr. Forbes, and hurried forth to set him too afire. He espied his man mounting the weather-stained gig, as it appeared, in some haste, and hailed him lustily. The doctor turned quickly, with one foot on the step, to stare in amazement at his friend's look and manner.

"Good Lord, Sinclair, what has happened?" he inquired as the other came up. "Has much learning made our Rector mad?"

"Hee, hee!" responded Sinclair, irresponsibly. "Mad, eh? mad! What intuition! I'll rely on you to send me to a cosy asylum. My gay Knight of Physic, have you ever accomplished the impossible? You may open your bonny blue eyes as wide as you like, I'm talking seriously."

"I don't think a straight-waistcoat will be necessary," remarked the doctor, as if speaking to himself.

"Thanks, the lunatic is of the harmless kind," said the Rector. "But he wants an answer."

"The question is odd," observed the doctor. "But suppose we answer in the affirmative."

"Then you will understand. Read that."

The doctor took the telegram and read it deliberately; then, looking curiously in Mr. Sinclair's face, he whistled.

"I congratulate the Rector of Aberfourie Academy. Sinclair, that boy's a born true-blue devil. I knew it from the moment I stitched him and set his broken ribs. Where he got his brains and spunk is a problem in heredity. Well!

I'm passing Pitweem this trip; come and tell Proudfoot and the others."

And, forgetting his rectorial responsibilities, Mr. Sinclair jumped up, and the two drove off in a spirit of boyish frolic and jubilation.

Pitweem and Burnside stood on their heads. If news had come that the brig o' Perth was down, and half the Fair City in ruins, there would have been less commotion than was caused by Mr. Sinclair's tidings. The dominie instantly closed school, driving his scholars forth helter-skelter like a flock of sheep, and Neil issued invitations on the spot to a high tea and "a little jollification after," and, with his eyes starting from his head in wonder, vowed he was not the least surprised. David took the thing with few words, though the twitchings of his face told their unmistakable tale, and Jessie was tears and smiles together like the poetic April day.

"See what a broken rib does," observed the doctor, when the first gush of joy and astonishment was over. "Well! what troubles me is that I'm afraid he's not to be my successor, after all. Double firsts don't practise medicine in Highland villages. I'll call for you on my way back, Sinclair. The Queen's about to get another subject, and we mustn't keep the good wife waiting."

"Ay, ay! we will know apout that," said Neil, nodding his head meaningly. "Folk will be gey and kind to the Queen that way too. You'll pe pack soon, doctor?"

"In no time, if the thing comes off properly," returned the doctor.

An hour and a half later the Queen had her new subject, and the doctor was back in Pitweem. Lisspeth—flustered, red, perspiring, yet valiantly endeavouring to look happy—was prompt with the tea; and besides the host and hostess, there sat around the festive board the doctor, the two schoolmasters, Red Sandy, David, and Jessie. The doctor, as the chief guest, was invited to take the seat of honour, but he gracefully declined.

"No," he answered, "that place belongs to another," and he made way for David. "We're proud, sir, to sit down with your son's father. Take your chair, David."

It was expected that the hero would be home immediately after the examinations; but he had planned otherwise. There came a letter, however, unusually long for a correspondent addicted to brevity, and of a tenor that made David retire

to the solitude of the woods to think, and brought even to Jessie's face an air of deep abstraction. As it touches a crisis and turning-point the reader is entitled to it *verbatim et literatim.*

DEAR AND HONOURED FATHER,—I have finished the Arts Course, as you know, and qualified for my degree. It will be a double first, and there are one or two little honours besides, the nature of which Mr. Proudfoot has probably explained to you. People here are congratulating me on all hands with expressions that make me blush; and I have had the most cordial message from Mr. Sinclair. He was not content to write but must needs telegraph. These things flatter, and one loves to believe them. But in any case I have tried to do my best; perhaps not many can wholly understand how I have striven. What is done, however, is done; and I am glad, not so much on my own account as because of my certainty that any success, big or little, I can gain, will gratify those who did so much for me when I so little deserved it. Thank you, dear father, and let me add, dear sister, thank you in love and gratitude for the opportunities you gave me, for the sacrifices you made for me. Looking back I see plainly what pain I must have caused you both, how often I must have distressed and disappointed you. Well! that is all past and gone, a part of the irrevocable. I cannot undo it, and I will not spend words in idle regret. But if it be any reparation, your unfailing love, your unspeakable patience and forbearance when I must have seemed to be wilfully thwarting all your desires, are now my most precious memories. Nor can time destroy them while it leaves me power to think, or to remember, or to be grateful. The return is poor indeed, but it comes from the heart. You will not doubt that.

"And now I am going to lay before you a matter which has been occupying my thoughts a good deal of late. I know you have set your heart on the pulpit, and the time has now come when in the ordinary course I should take up the study of divinity. But I am going to ask your leave to postpone the decision for a little. It is difficult to explain all the reasons which prompt me to make the appeal. So instead of trying to make clear what I should perhaps darken, I will ask you to trust me at this turning-point to decide for the best. Do not be alarmed, dear father, do not

for a moment imagine that my little honours have turned my head, or that I am going giddily into doubtful courses regardless of your approval. That would be a facile method of notoriety which does not in the least appeal to me. *My father's God is my God, and I will exalt Him.* Your example and teaching are not forgotten when I am away from you. They are part of my very being; the truths of my life. Need I say more? You will take me on credit once again as you have so often taken me already.

"I expect to be home soon, but before seeing you I am going to take a trip to England, to London and other places. Tell Jessie she shall have a full and true account of my experiences of the race that quartered Wallace and hung Cromwell in chains, 'First Impressions of the Savages of South Britain, with particular reference to native manners and customs, rites, follies, barbarities, &c.' by Karl Wilhelm von Homboag, Professor of Myopia (short-sightedness, father dear) in the University of (Göttingen, if you like) and Fellow of Learned Societies too numerous to mention. Artfully arranged it would make an impressive title-page. I'll have a look at St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, and Fleet Street, where sit the deputies of Providence, to wit the journalists of Babylon, humorously manufacturing toy thunderbolts, and the Houses of Parliament (shouldn't I like to speechify there some day!) and the Tower where patriots were wont to expiate their virtues, and the street of the Lombards, where long-nebbed Israelites still fleece the innocent Gentile; and I may be able to get on the track of some of their literary lights, and even get a glisk of their universities. And of all these hitherto undescribed wonders Jessie shall have a voluminous description. Let us hope she will be fittingly grateful. In the meantime give her my love, which please also extend to all at Pitweem if it will stretch so far. And remember me in your kindest way to Mr. Proudfoot, as well as to Mr. Sinclair if you see him. To them, after Heaven and my father and sister, I owe all.—I remain, dear father, ever your affectionate son,

"Evan Kinloch."

He was trusted without hesitation or scruple. David took a whole evening to tell him so, Jessie freely adding her consent; and out of the fullness of their hearts they were so garrulous that the letter cost double postage. To David the

thought that there should be any halting over the divinity brought a pang of regret; but the issue was in infallible hands, and he was content. Sometimes he fancied he must be dreaming. It was hard to believe that the student who had taken the prizes which men of learning made so much of, was his laddie, his own Evan, whom he had seen grow up amid so many disadvantages and discouragements. Many and many a time it had wrung David's heart to think of what was before the boy, and behold! on the very threshold of life, a dazzling prosperity.

But what pleased most was the assurance of unchanged affection. The sacred chain lengthened but did not break. Honours, applause, rewards had left Evan as he was. The father's heart rose bubbling; his eyes were misty with joy.

"He might have taken his own way without asking me," was David's remark to Jessie.

"He is the best of sons," returned the adoring sister.

"God has blessed me in my children," said David, and kings might envy his happiness.

Evan made his flying visit to the South, returning to Edinburgh to be capped. Mr. Sinclair contrived to be present and carried a full account of the ceremony to Pitweem; for Evan remained behind to complete some urgent work he had in hand.

"It was a pretty sight," reported Mr. Sinclair, deftly piquing interest that already ran high. "The black silk lined with white became him very well indeed. He was the youngest among them, I think."

"Ay, he'd be that," put in the dominie.

"The youngest student capped," said Mr. Sinclair, "and out of all reckoning the cleverest. The entire Faculty of Arts worships him. The thing was infectious; I was no whit better than the rest."

"What said you in a letter you once wrote me?" cried the dominie, jumping to his feet. "We'll a' be proud o' Robin. You mind the words. Sir, I tell you we are proud o' him. He's a lasting honour to your school and mine. You'll be grey and bald and toothless or you teach such another. He'll be remembered when our forgotten substance is food for the gowans, and a bleared sexton is mumbling at our awry headstones. It'll be said that he was taught by one Andrew Sinclair of Aberfourie Academy."

"'And thou in this shalt find thy monument
When tyrant's crests and tombs of brass are spent.'

We'll have no mincing of language when we're sure of sterling metal. You were once my best pupil, Andrew; I used to point to you when folk jeered. You'll pardon me if I point another way now."

"I'll not pardon you if you don't," answered Mr. Sinclair.

"And will he have the gown and hood to himself?" interpolated Jessie, whose mind ran on the splendour of academic robes. But the dominie brushed the vain question aside.

"And what's he up to now that he's not home?" he demanded.

Whereupon Mr. Sinclair grew mysterious, whetting curiosity with hints and nods.

"It'll all come out in good time. We mustn't divulge secrets," was all the definite information he would give.

"Fresh audacities, I'll be bound," observed the dominie. "I could wager my right hand there are more honours in the wind."

And he was right. While they were yet in the first heat of speculation over the Rector's secret, news came that Evan had taken a mathematical scholarship in Edinburgh, and an open exhibition at Oxford. When the dominie heard of Oxford, he turned suddenly pale, breathing short and quick, and staring like a man mortally smitten.

"So our eagle is going straight for the sun," he remarked in a broken voice. "Pray his eyes may not dazzle; pray his eyes may not dazzle. Well! well! what strange things the Fates bring to pass to be sure!" he added, picking his faculties together. "Herd boy, double first of Edinburgh, Exhibitioner of Oxford, and after that what we little wot of, I'm thinking. Lord! what a thing is brain. a pickle greyish matter, curiously creased and convoluted, say muckle fools. It's man's dearest possession, his very dearest. The Creator has nothing better to bestow."

"Except heart," said David quietly.

"For the sake of friendship we'll make the exception," returned the dominie. "But if we're to believe the minister of the parish and his learned brother of the Free Kirk, it's possible to get a new heart. Heaven itself can't give them new brains, greatly as they need them. Oxford! I never dreamed of that. But give our mountain bird a chance and it makes

for the peaks by instinct. Well, well! here is something more to think of in the sleepless night."

A little later, Evan and the dominie were once more roaming the hills and woods together.

CHAPTER XV

It remained for Mr. Dudley to give the *coup de grâce* to David's hope of the pulpit. The great financier, waxed rich beyond computation, was back in the Highlands as shooting tenant of Granvorlich, the most extensive grouse moor in half-a-dozen heathy parishes. It might be thought that guns, dogs, horses, game-keepers, ghillies, slaughter, *fêtes*, fashionable friends, and a correspondence which temporarily converted Aberfourie Post-office into a school for bad language would have given him occupation enough and to spare. But the fairies that flocked to his cradle had bestowed the rare and happy gift of a mind that expanded with expanding fortune. He found room for new interests however diverse and multitudinous without discarding the old, and he seemed to make it a point of honour to keep in touch with Evan.

"I have a young prodigy here," he would tell such of his guests as happened to be ignorant of the matter. "Have the goodness to take me seriously when I say I am watching the unfolding of genius. The study is only a little less fascinating than the eccentricities of 'Change."

"And the character of this native product?" some one would inquire, thinking probably of the generous wine and the tang of the rare Havana.

"Complex and highly original. Career divided into three principal stages so far—first, herd boy, kiltie with bare, brown legs (not unacquainted with the switch) and rebellious black hair shooting in defiant tufts through holes in a faded bonnet—a source of infinite tribulation in this initial period. Second, double first of Edinburgh University—ha! your peepers open; third, only beginning, Oxford and astonishment and discomfiture to placid plum-pudding knights and sedate grandfathers of learning. As perfect a dare-devil too

as heart could desire, a sort of second version of the Bob Clive who used to crow on steeple points before it occurred to him to found the British Empire in India. I have rescued the young scapegrace from a horse that had made up its mind to eat him alive, and had to lend a hand in stitching him afterwards. You shall see my young Napoleon for yourselves."

And Evan was made free of Granvorlich Lodge, nay, sometimes shouldered a gun and strode the heather that bloods from the south might assure themselves of his mettle. Some of them were disposed to be satirical at the beginning, but desisted on discovering how unerringly the winged retort struck home. And the shaft was delivered so deftly and prettily, yet with such evident innocence of design, that the sufferer was fain to smile over his hurt as a thing he was unfeignedly glad to have, a kind of

> "lover's pinch,
> That hurts and is desired."

"Dudley, your budding Bonaparte will do," was the verdict of a grizzled critic whose repartees had enlivened dreary midnight debates in St. Stephen's. "A nimble tongue with a nice edge to it. Tart, but by no means venomous. As self-possessed as Satan, yet never falling into presumption. Wit enough to keep him comfortably warm, and, rarest of all, tact as well as talent. We shall hear of him presently. What's he to be?"

"Undecided, I believe."

"Ah! One could almost imagine the youngster in the House tackling a whole Treasury Bench."

"Come to that," responded Mr. Dudley as well pleased as if the subject of discussion were his own son, "I'll go you one better and imagine *on* the Treasury Bench."

The grizzled critic screwed his mouth.

"That might be a matter of pence, my boy," he remarked. "A full mind and an empty pocket do not make a happy combination in politics. Yet a certain man of the seed of Jacob rules the roost minus any purse to speak of, ay, and what is more wonderful still, without prerogative of birth. Miracles will never cease. Since the advent of the spouting petticoat and triumphant democracy, philosophy's all at sea regarding our world."

"The old order changeth."

"Vanisheth you mean. My friend, it's chaos, stark naked chaos. How does Solomon of Ecclefechan put it? 'Roaring million-headed, unreflecting, darkly suffering, darkly sinning Demos come to call its old superiors to account.' Old Tom's got it in a sentence. That French Revolution taught him some wrinkles. But it's probably all right. Go ahead."

The decisive step was taken one day when Mr. Dudley, with Mrs. Dudley and Florence, visited Pitweem, at the urgent invitation of Lisspeth, for "a drink of sweet milk and a feed of gooseberries."

"You go to Oxford," he said to Evan, who attended to gather the fruit, "you go to Oxford with a reputation that will in itself be a spur. You will carry things before you as a matter of course. But after Oxford, what then?"

Then the prospect was vague.

"Let us try to clear away the mist," pursued Mr. Dudley, with the zest of one actively aiding destiny. "An Oxford honours-man—you see, I take certain important things for granted—has a pretty varied choice of careers. He may, if he be a bookworm, settle down to educational work, become Fellow and tutor of his college, write books, scribble for magazines and newspapers, and so forth. With a clearer eye to the main chance, he may mount by way of the Church—the Church of England, you understand. If his creed be right—and creeds are like compasses, good for any course—he may live to die a fat prelate. Then there's medicine, if your gorge doesn't rise at disease and death. But ambition's gem of gems is a public career. There's your shining mark. To that the Bar is the royal road—the English Bar, not the Scots. The law and the chancellorship," he added, laughing. "Think of them and keep your head."

Evan was eager, but David held back as from the brink of a precipice, and would have argued warmly had he had a tongue for his feelings. A dark idea haunted him that lawyers are little better than rogues—legal rogues who fleece their victims by sanction of Parliament, and are the worse on that account. Personal experience had revealed to him something of their devious ways, and he would have his son grow up an honest man. A whole sleepless night he tossed over the problem of Evan's choice, rising at break of day gaunt, hollow-eyed and still cogitating painfully. The

warmth of the sun proved in some sort a tonic and anodyne. Possibly his view was narrow, possibly he was altogether wrong. In any case justice had need of faithful ministers and servitors, and he would pray that Evan might keep clean hands and a sweet conscience. So, sorrowfully letting the pulpit slip, he gave his assent. It meant more, infinitely more, than his simple heart could divine, than his son's romantic head could dream, than the patron could possibly imagine.

In October Evan went up to Balliol, and found himself in a new world, animated by another atmosphere and other traditions than those upon which he had hitherto been nurtured. Edinburgh and Oxford lie but a brief day's journey apart, yet the one is to the other as windy steep to musky cloister; as Cameronian battle-field, grim with relics and wreckages of the fight, to the softness of epicurean culture drowsing on lotus and rose-leaves. Romance in both places, but as different as dusty noon and dewy twilight, as the actual and the visionary. Here the rousing clang of steel; the beat of timbrel and the blare of trump; there the brooding mind yielding itself with effeminate rapture to pure ideality. Here the blood-stained sword and Covenant, the fiery watchword of Isaiah and Gibeon; there delicate sentiment and dreamy philosophy, and a tradition too subtle to be analysed, too hoary to be reckoned in years. An unwonted awe seized upon the impressible child of the hills. He put out his hand into the dimness, and a chill antiquity grasped it; shadowy presences haunted the eternal dusk; great memories and associations weighed upon the imagination; the very stones exercised a sort of enchantment. One's business appeared to be less to work than to adore and philosophise in whispers. The awe wore off, however, and Evan took to his studies with the old vehemence of application.

His abilities and attainments were quickly discerned, and he was set apart from the ordinary undergraduate, the young spark from Eton or Rugby who goes up for "a pass and a good time;" and his Edinburgh reputation followed him; so that even as a freshman he had the rare distinction of being pointed to as a double first.

"A reading man," said the young spark, not entirely with admiration. "Means to do something, you know."

The singular intention was indubitable. Smalls opened

several pairs of eyes very wide, and Moderations appeared to denote that such as meant to enter the Finals against the dark-eyed Celt from the North had better be girding their loins for the fight. All doubt on the point vanished when he captured the blue riband of the university—the Ireland Scholarship "for classical learning and taste."

"Go on," said his tutor, a man of European reputation, when this honour was chronicled. "Go on, and I shall be proud of you."

And the Master, congratulating him, remarked curtly, "I think, sir, you have a mind that will win distinction."*

"By Jove, Kinloch is going it, you know," added the young spark, snatching a momentary attention from the delights of wine and supper parties. "Wonder what sort of machinery those reading chaps have fitted up inside their heads. Deuced odd, you know." Odd indeed, your lordship, and altogether ridiculous to one of your lordship's proclivities.

Like a good Scot, Evan not only toiled prodigiously, but lived with calculated thriftiness, partly that he might keep a clear head, but chiefly that he might not fail in a certain periodical remittance upon which he had early set his heart. His scholarships were handsome, and he augmented his income by accepting travelling tutorships in the long vacations instead of going home, greatly as he yearned for the heather. Thus, by doing the work of three men, he was able to "discharge current expenses," and to remember the folk at Pitweem in the manner which pleased him best. Of all that came to him they had their share, and not infrequently it was a Benjamin's portion.

For the rest he took recreation regularly, made a mark at the Union as an orator of promise and caustic wit, ran, walked, and pulled an oar that won plaudits from athletes. Presently he figured as a crack oarsman, proving himself an expert in the game of bumping; by-and-by he was actually adopted in the envied Eight, and it was found that his devotion to books had in nowise hurt wind or muscle.

So the years passed, and the crucial time, the time of the blasting of reputations, drew near. Evan was entered for

* The late Dr. Jowett, Master of Balliol, made the same or a similar remark to the late Mr. Walter Pater. Alas! that in referring to the author of "Imaginary Portraits," one should have to write "the late."

honours in both the Classical and Mathematical Schools; and it was whispered he had the audacity to dream of repeating his Edinburgh performances. But it was hopefully remembered that the pride of English public schools was arrayed against him. His tutors took wine together, compared notes, discussed probabilities, and, despite a ripe experience, awaited results with suppressed excitement. As for the candidate himself, he said little, made no boast, shut his mouth a trifle grimly, kept cool, and went into battle with the composure of a veteran.

In devising that final ordeal in Classics, English scholarship must have been aided by the devil. Mere cleverness will not avail; as little will mere knowledge. Brilliant men fail for lack of reading; full men for lack of talent. Candidate after candidate who goes in smilingly sure of victory, emerges from the fiery furnace cowed, scathed, scarred, and cruelly burned, to ruminate on the heartbreaking follies of ambition. The written tests are planned to try all weak places; but if there be any doubts left of the candidate's capacity, they are child's play to the torture of the *viva voce*. For the examiners are experts in the art of discrimination. Heartlessly patient (as it seems) in bringing the sciolist to grief, they are quick to detect "the good man" and free him offhand. To the stammerer the process is a long agony ending in crushing disaster. The space of five minutes saw Evan clear. A few questions asked indifferently, as if they were of no consequence, a united smile from the four inquisitors, and the affable remark, "Your papers are very good, sir," and it was all over. When he passed out, the unfortunates still waiting in tremulous uncertainty of their fates knew that he at least was safe; for speed is the infallible token of success. From the Mathematical School came the same tale; and so in due course it was announced that Evan Kinloch of Balliol had crowned a unique career by taking a brilliant double-first.

"Bearing in mind the increase in the amount of reading necessary for the highest honours," said the examiners, "the best double-first ever taken at Oxford. Scores a higher percentage in Mathematics than the last Senior Wrangler at Cambridge; sets us a new standard in classics."

And with unwonted enthusiasm Oxford declared she was proud of her son, and should watch his high destiny. Dining with the head of his college, he was presented to an

eminent statesman, himself a double-first of Oxford, and the ruler of the people condescended to talk with him of Homer and the Greek influence, to refer to the Union as the school of English oratory, and to hint, very delicately and sweetly, of a possible future in the House.

The host was more explicit.

"I think you take up the law," he observed in a disengaged moment after dinner.

Evan answered in the affirmative.

"An admirable choice," said the man of learning, who took pride in being a man of the world as well. "I always advise my promising young men to go to the Bar. It combines the intellectual and the practical as no other profession known among men combines them. Moreover, its prizes are worth a man's best efforts. And let me say, sir, that if to ability and energy you add prudence the nett result may be astonishing even to yourself."

Nor were other tributes wanting. He was carried off to college fêtes, he was dined and wined by sporting blades who commonly contemned erudition, and the scions of a patristic aristocracy poured upon him invitations to half the noble homes of England. These things were as drops of honey on the tongue. But sweeter yet were the messages from the North—from Pitweem, from Burnside, from Aberfourie, from the united Faculty of Arts in Edinburgh. Ineffably delicious too was the message from Mr. Dudley and Florence, for she must join her congratulations to her father's. The hero is shaped and impelled less by inherent force or impulse than by the breath of those he loves. If there were none to admire and praise, great deeds would fall out of fashion.

Upon those at home the tidings had the startling effect of a storm of electricity. David was struck dumb, and had to retire to commune silently with himself in the solitude of the spruce woods; Jessie was thrilled to irresponsible exaltation, not unmoistened by dew; and Neil, speaking shrilly from excitement, drew upon his lustiest superlatives to express his feelings. But none, not even David, was so profoundly moved as the dominie, perhaps because he best understood all that the intelligence meant. When the news came he locked himself in the little schoolhouse, that the tears he could not keep back might flow unseen.

"Ay, ay," he said aloud, "the eagle is born for the heights,

and ours has gained the topmost summit and stands alone in the unveiled radiance of the sun. Well, well! I first taught him the use of his wings. Fate and all its legions of devils cannot deprive me of that honour and satisfaction. My little Evan the best scholar in all Great Britain and Ireland! my mischievous, fighting rascal." And the tears fell the faster the harder he tried to smile. "Lord God of Jacob, how unsearchable are Thy ways! Two boys shall be herding kye and paidling in the burn together, the one shall be taken and the other left. Inscrutable, mysterious, past finding out. Double-first of Oxford, cock-nosed, supercilious Oxford, and a Burnside scholar! A drunken reprobate of a schoolmaster, a broken-down, battered, discredited divinity man, God forgive him! was swirled like driftwood out of the great current of the world into the backwater of Burnside, that the child of destiny should have his chance, and the reprobate is recompensed tenfold."

With a trembling hand he brought forth from the ricketty desk the tattered calendar which was among his treasured possessions. Reckoned by events, how long it seemed since that autumn evening when he made Evan read from that book! He saw the tousled boy standing with the open volume and eyes aglow with wonder, he remembered his own words and injunctions, spoken—how were they spoken? With no definite expectation perhaps, or but a faint hope of partial fulfillment. So many disappointments in this world; ay, and so many Thomases who decline to believe save on the evidence of the nailprints. He drew forth a newer book in which stood the favourite's name in the prescribed form and place; and then he pictured to himself the scene at the most famous of English universities. Presently he put the books gently back in their place, and having no language for his surging emotions he sat down still with eyes shining though wet.

At the end of half-an-hour he rose suddenly, crushed his rusty wideawake down over his eyes, and strode out. He made straight for Aberfourie, tramping the four miles well within the hour, and breaking in abruptly upon Mr. Sinclair, red, sweaty, and ebulliently elated. The Rector was engaged with a mathematical class.

"Send them about their business," said Mr. Proudfoot truculently; and when they were gone, "You've heard the news?"

"Yes."

"Well! and your opinion of it?"

"Brilliant," responded Mr. Sinclair warmly.

"Brilliant!" repeated Mr. Proudfoot with scornful emphasis. "Brilliant! God save us, how many brilliant things there are in this fine world! No fitter word in your vocabulary? Fish again. I take leave to call it unprecedented, unmatched, incomparable, the unique achievement of the Only if you like, which being interpreted means that if the Rector of Aberfourie Academy expects to see the performance repeated he had better take the old Roman cut to heaven to avoid heartbreak."

"He does not," said Mr. Sinclair.

"Therein he shows himself like himself," observed Mr. Proudfoot. "It were unwise to expect larks from a fallen sky." And thereupon the two settled down to discuss what had of late become the staple of their talk. A little later they were again brought excitedly together by the intelligence that the Craven Scholarship had been added to the list of honours. And about the same time there came a letter to Mr. Proudfoot announcing that after an absence of over three years Evan was coming home. The dominie sat into the grey hours studying it with an interest never roused even by his beloved classics, and at length went to bed to dream of it in mere snatches of sleep. It made graceful and grateful reference to the writer's unreckonable debt to his earliest teacher, and touching lightly upon the examinations, concluded: "As to the future I need not say much. If I cared to remain here I think I might count on a fellowship, and already it has been hinted that a professorship of Greek ayont the Tweed is open to me if I apply. These things are good; but I do not want them. I could not teach if I tried. Besides, I have crossed my little Rubicon, that is to say I am entered as a student at the Middle Temple. So it will be wig instead of cap. Though I shall be here a term or two yet for the sake of the scholarships, I am practically done with Oxford, except the Law School. I am longing—yearning is really the word—to see you all. Indeed I'm homesick. Nostalgia must be the banished Highlander's peculiar disease, I fancy. At any rate my heart's very much in the Highlands at this moment. I have been away more than three years. In that time I have traversed several countries famed for majesty and beauty of scenery, but I have seen

nothing like the braes abune Pitweem and Burnside. May the flowers bloom sweet on them, and the yellow grain wave to the wind! I hope to be climbing them soon again with just such company and such talk as I had when last there." ("The rascal, the rascal! is he sarcastic?" exclaimed the dominie.) "Meanwhile I am doing a little rowing to counteract the effects of the reading, and shall probably have the honour to pull an oar in the inter-university boat race. But as soon as I can escape I'm off to the heather and the hills."

CHAPTER XVI

THE distinction which fell to Evan as an oarsman was the notable one of stroking the Dark Blues. The place of honour was not assigned without dubitation and searchings of heart for he failed in what was held to be the first essential requisite. With the exception of bow oar he was the lightest man in the boat, and precedent, the supreme arbiter of the conventional, was hard against putting a light weight in the chief seat. It was not till after much debate, cogitation, watching, and testing that the selection was made. There were ardent advocates of bulk; but while bone and inches had their due force in argument, both president and coach remembered the value of nerve and judgment, of

> "The unconquerable will
> The courage never to submit or yield,
> And what is else not to be overcome."

So it came to pass that the choice fell on the hero of the schools. An earl's son rowed number four and an archbishop's number seven; a future dean was number three; and they were all from Eton but the stroke. Once every year, in the season when woodland saps begin to flow and the maiden's heart is strangely moved, the grave and venerable fathers of our great universities doff their dignities in a tumultuous return of the gaiety of youth, nay, are almost beguiled into the immoralities of betting. Over all things educational or intellectual they keep sternly calm heads, but the "Derby of boating," the "fête of the oar," is too much for the greyest of greybeard wisdom with aught

left of the pith of other years. Here and there a cobwebbed creature will stick to the schools despite all external seductions; but the souls of the universities are with the practising Eights.

The training of these, as the initiated will tell you, is rigorous to the point of cruelty. The Church talks of asceticism; but the only real ascetics are the racehorse and the crack oarsman, for they are continent by compulsion. The Decalogue is elastic (probably because of long and rough usage), but the rules of the rowing committee are rigid as death. No man may break them and keep his place; so it comes that on the crucial day the University Eight are steel and whipcord.

Neither the athlete nor his worldly patron commonly regards scholastic achievement; but it was remarked by professional sports as an odd circumstance that the Oxford crew should be stroked by a double-first. The auguries were doubtful. During practice a prophetic Press daily decided the coming contest, giving such personal particulars of the crews as shrewd reporters and sub-editors guessed would be popular. It was noted that Cambridge had the heavier men, and Oxford the prettier style. The odds were two to one on the former. As the practice drew to a close, however, the critics intimated that Oxford had suddenly bettered its prospects, and many were sore over being duped into putting money on what might prove to be the wrong side. On the final afternoon the scratch crew, muscular, strong-winded, determined, laid wait for the Dark Blues in the last mile of the course, bent on "letting them have it," and kept alongside for exactly thirty seconds. The pace was a revelation.

"Whu!" said the blown scratch, gazing after the glimmering meteor, "Cambridge has its work cut out for to-morrow."

The great day came with brilliant sunshine, and a breeze which crisped the water into flashing ripples of silver. Putney adorned itself in bunting, and "the leisured classes," fashionable and the reverse, streamed forth in picturesque variegation to do honour to the Olympian Games. The banks of old Thames had never, it was said, been pressed by such a multitude, nor his waters crowded by such a diversity of craft. The Dudleys, with a distinguished company, were among those afloat, and Florence was queen of an adoring

court. But the subtlest gallantries failed to chain her thoughts. It was one who was not there that made her cheeks glow and her eyes dance.

It was fifteen minutes past one, when, after hours of electric tension, a sudden vociferous tumult announced that the suspense was over. The Cantabs, as the challengers, launched first, paddling quietly to their stake boat, the focus of a thousand glasses. In the space of five minutes they were followed by the Oxonians, and there was another uproarious outburst. Both crews, it seemed, were studiously indifferent, looking carelessly about as if wondering, in a mild way, at the commotion. On the appearance of the Dark Blues, Florence gave a little shout on her own account.

"Oh, there's Evan, there he is," she cried, the binocular shaking in her jewelled fingers. "Pulling with one hand as he turns to those behind, and looking as cool as a cucumber."

"My dear," said her mother beseechingly, "pray follow his example in the matter of coolness. You are really quite forgetting yourself."

"He does look well," was the response, and before her mother could avert the scandal, Florence was sending the perfume from a dainty lace handkerchief down upon the wind; and as she waved she thought incongruously of a certain raspberry thicket in the Highlands.

The arrangements were soon made. Cambridge won the toss and chose the Surrey side. Both boats moved briskly into position, caps and wraps were torn off and flung at the umpire's head, and two-and-thirty brown arms reached for the oars, their corded muscles starting into quivering life as at the prick of a spur. The next moment sixteen gleaming blades hung motionless in the sun; then, as the craning multitude held its breath, there came a tiny puff of smoke, and they were off before the instant thunder-peal could go up.

Oxford, it was observed from the Press boat, caught the water first, but Cambridge had the quicker stroke, striking a rather flurried thirty-eight to their opponents' thirty-six. The greater rapidity of the Cantabs gave them the advantage by a boat's nose in the first half-minute, and those on the Cambridge steamer yelled themselves red in the face. The Oxonians quickened to thirty-seven, bringing a responsive howl, and immediately the Cantabs rose to thirty-

nine, the latter by dint of Titanic effort keeping their head canvas a finger-length to the front.

"Quicken up, Oxford; let 'em have it"; "Well rowed, Cambridge, make 'em blind," were among the stormy cries which encouraged them; but, as if disdaining to be urged by people who knew nothing whatever about it, Oxford dropped to thirty-five and Cambridge to thirty-six. They were passing Craven Steps, two minutes fifteen seconds out, and were neck and neck.

"They're settling to work," said the knowing ones. Now we can judge of the chances."

To the untrained eye there was not a pin to choose between them; but experts remarked that the Dark Blues had the easier, cleaner sweep, and the better command of themselves.

> "'Out and in at a single dash,
> Flash and feather, feather and flash,
> Without a jerk or an effort or splash—
> It's a stroke that will break your heart,'"

cheerily sang a friend of the Oxonians.

At the mile post, reached in four minutes six seconds, the nose of the Oxford boat appeared for the first time to the front. The Light Blues, spurting hardily, made up their leeway, and the crowd yelled at the Dark Blues to quicken. The stroke, however, remained a swinging thirty-four, clean, full, unflushed, and in less than a minute the Dark Blue canvas was again ahead. An inch, a foot—two feet—a quarter, half a length, it went to the front. Once more Cambridge spurted, but Oxford declined to budge from that terrible thirty-four, and the coach, who staked his reputation on the long and slow, could not contain his glee. There were others equally enthusiastic.

"Oo's the bloomin' strowke?" inquired one eager gentleman. And another consulting his newspaper fired back the information, "Hevan Kinloch, ten stone eleven, bally 'ighlander. Wears petticoats when 'ees at 'ome. Double fust."

"Wot bloomin' rot is that, 'Enery?" demanded the other.

"Dunno," said 'Enery, fastening his eyes once more on the boats skimming like a pair of swallows for the horizon.

At the end of seven minutes and a half the Dark Blues shot through Hammersmith Bridge a full length ahead, and it seemed the voice of the whole earth was in the roar that went up. Yet again the Light Blues spurted desperately,

putting themselves level with their opponents. Thus pressed the Oxonians quickened to thirty-five, to thirty-six, and finally to thirty-eight, against the Cambridge forty, and the boats gave leap for leap like greyhounds closing in the chase.

"A dead heat!" was the cry, and the enthusiasm became a tempestuous frenzy.

While the crowd yelled general encouragement, backers screamed to watch the form, which, indeed, was such perfection of mechanic art as might result from steam and steel, so firm and clean the oars struck, so light and swift was the recovery. To and fro like weavers' shuttles the rowers shot, and the flying boats scarce seemed to touch the water. It was any one's race, and betting was even. Then all at once the stroke fell, and once more the Dark Blue canvas bobbed to the front.

At that Florence, who had been watching in a kind of anguish, clapped her hands wildly, and Mrs. Dudley forgot to rebuke.

"Oxford is going to win," cried the young lady, lifted beyond all thought of maidenly reserve. "They're going to win. Well done, well done! Evan."

"Undoubtedly," observed her father, taking breath for a cheer, "undoubtedly they mean to win."

At Biffin's Yard, despite all the Light Blues could do, the Oxonians were half a length ahead, and next minute they had added another quarter to their lead. Urged to fury, the Cantabs rose to a maddened forty-one.

> "But in spite
> Of the killing pace and the stroke of might,
> In spite of bone and muscle and height,
> On flies the dark blue like a flash of blue light,
> And the river froths like yeast."

The spectators went red and hoarse; then gradually sobered from exhaustion to realise that, barring accidents, the race was over.

This conviction had just taken root in their minds when a thing happened in the Oxford boat which sent a cold shudder through the multitude, and made many gape in blank despair.

"A broken oar," cried the coach huskily. "They'll never win now." And he could have wept in sheer vexation.

Almost as he spoke No. 5 dived from the disabled boat, disappearing under it. The light craft rocked and plunged

as if swamping, and from the disordered splashing it appeared the whole crew were catching crabs together. "Lost their heads," said the agonised coach, trying to wrench away an iron bar. "They may as well drown as do that."

It needed that momentary pause or break to enable the spectators properly to perceive the tremendous velocity of the Cambridge boat. Swifter and swifter it seemed to fly as it overhauled the staggerer in front, darting at every Titanic stroke with a bird-like lightness and eagerness as if exulting in its power of flight. In half a second it would be ahead, and nothing could save the Dark Blues. The Dark Blues, however, had still notions of working out their own salvation. As their friends trembled over a foregone conclusion the stroke was seen to throw a lightning glance over his shoulder. What he said none save the six men at his back heard; but as the Light Blues swept to certain victory down went the chins of the Oxonians with a sudden fierce motion, their blades struck with a single crack, and the arrowy craft leaped from the gulf of its own wash at the impulse of a terrific thirty-eight. They needed all their power of wind and limb. Fired with new hope and vigour, the Cantabs, now half a length to the good, pulled like fiends. Oxford instantly quickened to forty, and in a moment more to forty-two, creeping up on their opponents snail-like, inch by inch. They had never rowed before, their performance in the first part of the course being child's play to what they were doing now; but could they keep it up? It's the pace that kills, and veterans counted the seconds for the inevitable breakdown. It was deferred till in the excitement it was forgotten. For three delirious minutes there was a race that made hardened sportsmen howl like novices, and the Oxford coach led the shrieking.

But the Light Blues had equal cheering, for the fury of triumph was upon them; they were eight to seven, and the betting was two to one. The multitude exploded in peal upon peal, and within sight of the racers there was not a man, woman, or child who did not thrill to grip an oar.

At the end of three minutes the Dark Blues showed they had wind yet for further effort by quickening to forty-three. For perhaps ten dizzy seconds the Cantabs, rowing blind to the screeching of their cox, endeavoured to respond. But the Dark Blue nose was lifting itself unconquerably to the front. A foot was gained, then lost, then recovered; then, at a bound as it appeared, half a length was put to the good;

and the Light Blues, palsied, spent, demoralised, fell off to a futile thirty-five; while the Oxonians, easing to thirty-seven, passed the goal in flawless form a length and three-quarters ahead; and the heavens seemed splitting with the applause.

Time for the four miles and a quarter, eighteen minutes forty-eight seconds. "The fastest on record," said the initiated.* Some of the Cantabs had brandy poured between white lips; but in the Oxford boat not a man was limp, and the coach grew tall on the strength of his training.

In the evening, according to ancient and honoured custom, the crews and their chosen friends dined together, and there was infinite merry-making; but when the winning stroke was called upon for a speech it was found he had mysteriously disappeared.

"It's not like Kinloch to funk," observed some one.

"No," answered another with a meaning smile, "and if you follow the course of empire westward I'll give two to one you'll find him in anything but a funking humour."

The first whistled. "Playing Romeo to some ravishing Juliet, eh?"

"She was on the river to-day. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the oarsman's philosophy. The devil will rise early, my friend, the day he's up to Kinloch of Balliol."

Evan had followed the course of the empire no farther than Park Lane, where there was a reception in the Dudley mansion that he would not have missed for many toasts. In that congregation of the votaries of Mammon and fashion his victory with the oar was in everybody's mouth, but only a few remembered he was a double-first. Among the minority was a prominent politician who had some quiet words with him in a corner, and remarked to Mr. Dudley afterwards:

"Your young friend is going for the law, he tells me. Well! as the law leads ambition to honours *viâ* St. Stephen's, we shall have him in the House as a matter of course, and he'll be doing to us as he did to the men of my poor old university to-day."

On the other hand, a dowager of fashion having watched him for a little was pleased to request he should be presented to her.

* This record has since been reduced by one second—by the Dark Blues.

"I saw your performance to-day," she said when they had got over preliminaries. "It was very pretty." Evan bowed. "Very pretty indeed. But I am not at all sure," she added, with a little trill of laughter, "that I shouldn't hate you."

Evan murmured something about a calamity.

"Now, now," said the dowager, trilling again, "I am old enough to be your grandmother, and you must not be sarcastic. The fact is I had a nephew in the disgraced boat. But all's fair in love and war. You may feel disposed to test the axiom some day. You took honours in the schools, too, as they are called. What, pray?"

Evan answered briefly and technically, and she observed vivaciously, "You must be very learned—Greek and Latin, and all that sort of thing. I must own the classics always boggled me, and as to science, I know as little of it as it knows of me. One is astounded in one's old age to find one has lived so long in a world about which one knows so little. Providence is long-suffering. You'll be at Henley, of course?"

Evan feared he would not.

"The University Eights will be there," she said in surprise, "and you will certainly miss an ovation from the girls."

"I give it all to my companions ungrudgingly," said Evan, "because when they are receiving plaudits at Henley I hope to be among the heather."

"That is most ungallant of you," returned the vivacious old lady. "Well! you must come and see me. I have two sons, solicitors, and the barrister, I am told, prospers by grace of the solicitor." And she bowed majestically and passed on.

"Handsome and clever," she said of him a minute later, "and his self-possession is astonishing. I'm too old to be deceived, my dear. Mark me, he's the stuff out of which romance is made. Remember that I told you. And if I were Miss Florence Dudley's mother I would keep an eye on her. You may have noticed my lady's glances at her knight of the oar." And to be sure Florence was at no pains to disguise her interest in Evan and his doings.

"The fun this afternoon," she said, where the words might kindle jealousy, "was almost as good as gathering raspberries in the Highlands."

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.—THE ORACLE OF FATE

Had we never lov'd sae kindly!
Had we never lov'd sae blindly!
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

BURNS.

CHAPTER I

THE home-coming was long a favourite topic of discourse by barn door and ingleside, for those who witnessed it told wondrous tales. Neil, with "the machine" scrubbed to perfection and violently done in blue and red after designs by the owner, was at the station, David and the dominie accompanying. A full hour they had to wait for the signal of the southern mail, bottling their impatience and parrying the questions of friendly groups who, remembering Evan's days of hodden-grey, desired to know what colleges and the great world had done for him. The dominie, who loved to stir curiosity, had eyes bulging and heads wagging over many a consummate fable.

All at once there rose a white wavy line of smoke against the horizon, and Neil, breaking off in the midst of a debate on the mysteries of Providence and the vanity of human wishes, cried out excitedly, "She's coming, she's coming!" Almost as he spoke there came to their ears the boom of express wheels on steel girders spanning the Tay, followed closely by the screech of the steam-whistle, and bursting from resounding woods, the train, with the brave front which belongs to conquering things, swept on, bringing with it the bustle and éclat of cities and centres of fashion.

"Maybe we'll not know him," remarked Neil hastily to David, in Gaelic. "He's been away three years now, and

three years is a long while at his time of life. Maybe he has a beard."

Before David could answer, two big locomotives, each bearing the name of a Highland chieftain, were hissing and spluttering alongside. In the line of carriages a head was thrust from a window, and a face, turning swiftly fore and aft, broke suddenly into a smile of recognition. The next instant a light figure leaped to the platform, and David ran, charging indiscriminately against barriers animate and inanimate. Precisely what happened next he never knew. Nor were Neil and the dominie, who made haste to follow and swell the confusion, any clearer in their minds. It was not until Evan was out of the tumult and securely wedged in "the machine" that coherency came out of chaos. Then by degrees both sides began to make notes. The studious Neil was profoundly impressed by the metropolitan style of his nephew's holiday suit, his smart looks, and awesome air of cosmopolitanism.

"You will be a grand fine gentleman now, Evan," he remarked admiringly. He spoke in Gaelic, but somehow expected to be answered in elegant English. He was delighted to enthusiasm when the laughing response came with as true a native smack as if the speaker had never set foot beyond the bounds of Logieburn parish.

"And gosh, they tell me you know an extronar lot too," added Neil, changing his tongue. "As much maype as our minister, ay, or the fery dominie himself," glancing slyly at Mr. Proudfoot.

"You'll observe that your uncle still finds fair words the cheapest comfits," said the dominie. "But letting courtesies go by the board, I'll plank a crown against a groat he'll never guess how ministers and dominies are like Portia's suitors."

"Teet no," said Neil. "How?"

"Just in being as God made them. They are seldom, Heaven and their victims know, what they might or should be; yet here and there a member of the discredited craft takes pride in honouring scholarship," and he bowed to his old pupil.

"And here and there a scholar takes pride in reverencing his master," said Evan, promptly returing the obeisance.

"Ah, Evan, Evan!" said the dominie with a queer expression. "You remember that day with the calendar. Lord!

what a bat is man when he knocks his head against futurity. How often have I dreamed of that day since?"

"Oftener than of your sins, dominie," chimed in Neil, unconsciously tickling the horse to a canter. "Oftener than of your sins. The minister jalouses you're a backslider. The dominie kept us posted," bobbing his head at Evan. "Woa, ye daft teffle of a prute peast, would ye cowp us?" he cried as the horse sprang at a cut of the whip. "The mischief will pe in the fery feet of the thing."

Chancing to glance over the ears of the startled horse and through an avenue of trees Evan at that moment spied the flutter of a handkerchief on a knoll outside Pitweem gates. Scarcely had he got over his thrill at the sight when Jessie was upon him with the impetuous affection of an adoring sister, while Lisspeth, her face shining, her apron speckless and creasy, advanced with a battalion of the Clan Macgregor, as a possible guard of honour. For a moment it was the confusion of the platform worse confounded, only that now the commotion was softened by trills of womanly laughter that was all the brighter for the tears which glistened behind.

"It will take the womenfolk to do it," remarked Neil, beaming moistly. "Think, dominie, how the angels in heaven will laugh and greet in the same breath when you step in by to the fold. Man, it will pe worth while peing a sinner just to see them."

"Yes," said the dominie absently, for he was watching David and Jessie gulping their joy, and when presently they bore Evan triumphantly off to the privacy of their own cottage he added, "There's Paradise. Pitweem, in spite of fat kye and porkers it's worth while living. Ye blinking devil, ye'll not deny that?" And Pitweem owned he'd sooner think of jumping over the nearest linn.

Two days and two nights Evan was left in peace to his father and sister, and incidentally to his uncle, his aunt, and cousins if they cared to have him; then the dominie appropriated him body and soul. What rare speech the two had by corrie and linn, and among the broom and heather, what joyous excursions they made through the realms of classic heathendom, were a long tale to tell. Homer and Horace, rake and cynic, the twin divinities of Burnside were as boon companions. Plato, "face of sunshine, heart of fire," as the dominie called him, also graced the company; and for

diversity Aristophanes was there, tongue in cheek, eyebrow ironically arched. A later Aristophanes, one made in Germany though bearing no Teutonic stamp, was specially introduced by Evan, to wit Heinrich Heine. Over him the dominie slapped his leg.

"A rare rascal," he would cry: "Bobbie Burns with a taint of universal culture. A shameless dog in a Christian era; wit, scoffer, poser, libertine, heretic, philosopher, poet, *bon vivant;* a Jew with the most delicious vices of the Gentile, a Gentile with the savoury vices of a Jew; an epitome of all that's delightful and forbidden. As I live, our pious Bubblyjock, the minister of the parish, shall know him."

Over Carlyle, whom Evan also introduced, there was a momentary wryness of mouth. But all at once the Titanism and poetry took effect, and Mr. Proudfoot became a transcendentalist on the spot.

"A great epic poet," he would exclaim of his hero. "But why did inscrutable Heaven deny him the gift of song while vouchsafing it to so many intellectual babes and sucklings? In Elysium be it mine to grasp the hand of Thomas Carlyle."

There were others a little lower than the angels and demigods. Matthew Arnold and Algernon Charles Swinburne were presented because they were fashionable at Oxford. Mr. Proudfoot fastened on them hungrily; but feasted perhaps less royally than he expected.

"Arnold," he said, "is as dainty a gentleman as ever essayed the task of Hercules in kid gloves. Lavender and pomade, sprinklings of rose water to keep a festering world sweet. Heyday! grapes off thistles and figs from blackthorns. Exquisite Matthew, wafting Sabœan odours from Socratic robes. A School Inspector you tell me. Lord, Lord! how this world is given to irony. He offers sweetness and light, and is put to scare brainless brats who will not get their lessons. O grateful country! O discerning governors! Arnold has breathed the clarified atmosphere of Greece—in winter. He is like a starry night with a touch of frost—beautiful and chilly."

"And what of his brother poet, sir?" asked Evan.

"There we go at a bound to the tropics. From out the purple mists come haunting melodies, ravishing, passionate; but the tune is beyond me."

Asked his opinion of the poetic idol of the Victorian

epoch, he answered curtly that he did not like "being kissed by a girl with syrupy lips."

They came to close quarters with Oxford. Ever craving for the particular and personal, Mr. Proudfoot was all agog about this celebrity and that, Evan gratifying him with rapid impressionist sketches, none too reverent, it is to be feared. But the exceptions were conspicuous. Two men stood out in his estimation above all others: one the Master of his own college, a wit and man of the world as well as a scholar of fame; the other a bashful Renascence tutor who shrank from the sound of his own voice. Them Evan depicted as a man depicts the woman he loves. The dominie was aglow with interest.

"Ay, man, ay," he would interject at some trenchant particular. "The Master says that about Greek. God, that's fine, that's fine. I tell you that man's no piece of educational parchment as sapless and withered as a kailrunt, but a very vital power. And he loves Homer and Plato and our good Sir Walter with an equal love. Sir, I honour him."

For the Renascence tutor his admiration was less spontaneous, and in general he regarded his pupil's love for Oxford with a measure of jealousy. Evan forbore to dispute, but one day he observed with a smile:

"Some day, sir, you shall go there and return with the Oxford fever like the rest of us."

Occasionally Mr. Sinclair joined them, and then the beloved classics would give place to high problems in mathematics. At times, too, Mr. Lauchlan Duff looked in with his fiddle and the old unquenchable thirst.

"Man, am gled to see ye just yer auld sell," Mr. Duff said to Evan at the first meeting in Pitweem. "A wee thocht touched in the tongue as was to be expeckit, a braw fine accent an' a' that, an' just a kennin' dandier i' the dress," cocking his eye shrewdly over Evan's apparel, "but that'll be the faut o' the fules o' tailors; otherwise little the waur. Ye mind what Bobbie says, sae lang's the heart's richt the coat'll do. That's gospel. He was never at college any mair nor mysel, Rabbie, and yet baith o' us hes our bits o' usefu' knowledge. What kind o' drink do the English bodies maistly tak to?"

"Beer," said Evan.

"Beer!" echoed Lauchie. "Och, och! it gies me a pain to think o't. Sirs, it's an awfu' thing to be born withoot a

pickle sense. Beer—pig's slush! and so much good soond liquor in the land! Hae they nae feelin' in their throats ava? Weel! the man that gies me a drap whisky can hae beer till he splits. I tak' it ye'd like a bit tune on yer return to the Heelands."

They had the tune, and Lauchie had moistenings which made him hilarious.

In the middle of a sprightly lilt his eye accidentally rested on Mr. Proudfoot, and his face became on the instant like a sexton's.

"What's the maitter this while back?" he inquired, letting his nether jaw down lugubriously.

"Maitter where?" said Neil.

"Wi' the dominie," returned Lauchie, staggering a little but maintaining his sepulchral air. "Look at him. He's gane clean off his drink. I've noticed the change wi' feelins I widna like to name. He's getting deathly white in the face owr't too, him that used to be rosier than the rose. Ay faith, what am feared o' is that he's no' lang for this world."

"When he goes to a better he'll put in a word for you," said the dominie.

"It would be kindly done," responded Lauchie, "for indeed the thocht o' lowin' brimstane's no consolin'. I've been seriously minded whiles to turn saint just for my soul's sake. It's a sair trachle fechtin' the desires o' the body though."

Just then Lisspeth chanced to enter, and Lauchie, dropping the spiritual mood, began to sing,

> "'Bonnie Kate o' Cairnbeddie,
> Sonsie Kate o' Cairnbeddie,
> Auchteen stone and sax feet ane.

"Am no sure hoo the ballant runs; but if I'm no mista'en it mair nor hints an elephant micht shelter in her shadow, or maybe it's a reenoserus, ane o' them ungodly things wi' its horns where its snoot should be, a misshapen hash o' a thing a'thegither. In my bogle days it was auld Nick, Clootie ye ken, used to come into my head time aboot. Ye'll find perteeculars in the Scriptirs. And now, guidwife, be steppin'!"

"Steppin' where?" asked Lisspeth.

"To dance, my lass," cried Lauchie. "D'ye think am goin' to sit here a' nicht scrapin' to graceless sinners?"

"Inteet, I will not pe dancing at all, Lauchie," protested the lady.

"My name is Grampian," said Lauchie, flourishing his bow and winking both eyes hard at her. "On the Norval hills my faither, rest his soul—but never mind that. It's the *Heeland Fling* we want. And that same would be a sicht for sair een."

He made a sudden movement with the fiddle, but his legs proving treasonous he unexpectedly found himself prone on the floor. Neil and Evan charitably helped him to bed in the barn, and on the way thither Mr. Duff sorrowfully reproached his host.

"I like ye, Pitweem," he said. "For a' yer sins, an' they're blacker than scarlet, I like ye weel enough. But in the matter o' drink ye've nae mair sense nor a tinkler's cuddy. It's a fair shame. See what ye've done," stumbling to his knees in spite of supporting arms. "I hev'na hed a drap mair nor eight glasses, my oath on that, an' this is my condeetion. Pitweem, ye'll get yer fairin' for this yet. They'll sizzle ye, and ye deserve't. Laddie," he added, casting a red eye upon Evan, "beware o' the deceits o' this warld. When ye tak' whisky, see that the stuff's good; that's the chief end o' drinkin'."

CHAPTER II

To the sweet delights of wit, poetry, romance, caricature, and re-fought battles succeeded the Syllabus of the Council of Legal Education, a thing as juicy and savoursome as last year's thistles. Those who had hitherto followed Evan with the zest of partners in his triumphs fell away, feeling he was bound for unknown lands. Even the dominie could but look on wondering at the faculty that throve on the Institutes of Justinian, on Torts and Contracts, on Equity, Procedure, and Evidence, in a word on legal chaff and husks, as famously as on the nutritive classics. Where was this boy to stop? Whence had he got his ambition, his amazing energy, his limitless talent? Mr. Proudfoot hovered about him like a bird about its fledgeling, marking his ripening powers with transports of gladness and much astonishment;

at times overcome by a desire to caress and cry out in pure joy of heart, and then again all at once standing off in a tremor at the idea that a gulf, a great gulf, was opening between them. There was, indeed, no shadow of doubt as to the steadfastness of Evan's affection; but in intellect he was no longer the fictile substance that took shape so easily at a touch of the potter's hand. That phase had passed, passed like the song of last year's nightingale; and the dominie sighed a little at the thought that what was gone would return no more forever.

He still had the mentor's interest in Evan's studies. The good Justinian he took up for the sake of the classic flavour, and went through "The Decline and Fall" a second time, after the lapse of a generation, with a kind of malicious rapture.

"God! it's well that kirk members are blissfully ignorant of their Gibbon," he would call out, chuckling. "Listen to this," and he would deliver the barbed shaft of the sceptic historian.

He even glanced at Maine and Bentham on Jurisprudence (as amended by Mill), and dipped into a library of text-books. But it was dry work, and he gave it up.

"You go for honours as usual?" he said one day.

Evan nodded.

"Then all I can say is Heaven speed thee. The *Corpus Juris Civilis* is too tough for me."

Spring blossomed luxuriantly into summer. Low, storm-swept skies lifted, expanded, lightened as by magic. Wan, sodden pastures burst into bloom and fragrance of clover and buttercup and daisy. The broom brightened the dun uplands with glints of gold, and the young crops made a green sheen below. Finally, that there might be no mistake about the progress of the seasons, the little boy, honouring pristine instincts, went forth into the thickets to harry with undisguised glee in man's prerogative to thieve and kill. All the while the Kinloch cottage was a busy temple of the law. Touch was nevertheless maintained with the big world away to the south—the errant, wicked world that whirls on an axis of its own devising, and provides its own Decalogue. Intelligence came to the recluse of a dazzling brilliancy of fashion at Henley, and the glorification of the University Eights.

"You poring, pondering old owl," wrote one of the Dark

Blues, cheerily, "why are you not here? You are missed; you have been eagerly inquired for by beauty that would have turned your head. Think of that and kick yourself. Do it well, pray. I suppose you're already as dry as parchment; Heaven preserve you from ever getting as yellow. And that reminds me, *Dieu sait pourquoi*, I've been in love and out of it on a fair average sixty times an hour since coming to this unholy Henley. You never in all your travels, nor yet in your dreams, saw such style, such rainbow and azure visions of white and pink, and nameless gauze and gossamer; never felt, I'll be bound, such provocation to fly in the face of Moses and the Prophets. Why can't England be sensible and adopt the plurality system? Think of the chances of a man of means and taste if our great-grandmothers at Westminster were to take a wrinkle from the liberal-minded prophet of Salt Lake City. One could do himself and his country some credit then. I am lost, old man, in an Eden of many Eves. Pray for me. The point is, which charmer it's to be? And by-the-by I learn from a certain Society paper that a certain rich financier, plus wife and lovely daughter, is or has been here. I have seen her—seen her stepping—but there, I shall break into lyric verse if I go on, and the tribe of Sappho turns my stomach. All this, and you in the glens trying to batten on maggoty rehashes of the decayed vices of nations. Isn't that what your law books are? You deserve to have ten bushels of the fustiest cobwebs in the Middle Temple crammed down your throat and drink forever denied you. As for me, the Grand Turk of amorous memory was never more divinely intoxicated on *beauté du diable*. Heigho! 'One hour of crowded glorious life'—I'm not a reading man, you can finish it for yourself."

Evan could easily imagine the varying transports of his correspondent, a susceptible Apollo with a long purse, a nice taste in pleasure, and an ineradicable aversion to learning. And that glimpse of one daintily stepping—into a carriage probably—how it sent the hot blood flying! For one moment the devoted student had half a mind to curse the father of competitive examinations, but the next ambition swept the weak thought out of existence. The Council of Legal Education first, and afterwards such bliss as the gods might ordain. He bent to his task more grimly than ever. A determined bout with Roman and English law, honours, a name in the Temple, and then, if Heaven pleased, cakes

and ale. But mice and men often plan vainly for the morrow.

The big world outside had of late been troubled with portents. What the wise call the political horizon was black with brewing tempests. The country was in a simmer, some said with discontent, others with mere whim and a fantastic desire for change. The Government had been in for full five years, and Governments are the playthings of constituencies. These were now itching for the fun of kicking out. Cards had been much shuffled. Party managers were passing sleepless nights; prophets prophesied, angrily giving each other the lie; democratic voters smoked their black pipes watchfully, calculating when they might expect candidates and their proselytising wives with fair promises and fresh receipts for happiness; and editors and leader-writers hurled their thunderbolts with rousing sound and fury. Six months this went on and nothing happened. Then one fine midnight when the electorate was placidly snoring, and even Fleet Street nodded, suddenly the game at Westminster became animated and dramatic. The court cards changed hands with results that made sober men shriek; and next morning the country awoke in the throes of a general election.

Mr. Dudley, who had dallied with the parliamentary coquette and done some political nursing, declared his love and selected a constituency. The fact was abruptly announced to Evan in a telegram: "Standing for Beltingham. Can you come and help?" Could he come and help? Could the war-horse resist the blast of the trumpet? Justinian and his companions went headlong into a corner, a portmanteau was hurriedly packed, some hasty farewells were taken, Neil and "the machine" called out, and within ten hours Evan was on the London express, debating politics red-hot and with overwhelming fluency. By the time he reached Euston the war fever was fully developed. Already a fighter of the opposite camp had called him a babbler, and his party a party without honour, honesty, ability, or policy. The taunt was as stimulating as the thrust of a spear.

A carriage was in waiting and whirled him to Park Lane through streets electric with suppressed excitement. Though it was early, Mr. Dudley had gone to the Executive Offices of the Party in response to a summons from the secretary, but Mrs. Dudley overflowed with cordiality. Evan was un-



expectedly touching her life at an acute angle; for perhaps the first time his existence had an actual appreciable meaning for her, because his talent was ranging itself beside her social ambition. Florence too was there radiant with joy, hope, and a certain hesitating coyness unusual with her. The hesitancy, however, soon disappeared.

"It was so good of you to come to papa's aid," she said when they were talking freely together. "And he will be so glad to have you. The excitement was tremendous. Everything's topsy-turvy. I wish I were a man, were it only for eight-and-forty hours, just to have my fling. I'd mount the hustings, or whatever you call them, and make speeches and rouse and captivate and convince. I have immortal longings, as Cleopatra says. Oh! it would be glorious."

He looked full in her glowing face. He had never seen her so lovely, so animating, so enchanting. An odd sensation stirred his breast, and he thought of his Henley correspondent.

"You need not mount the hustings to captivate," he said quietly.

"If you were a voter, Sir Cavalier, you have no idea how much pleased I should be with your gallantry," she answered with a laugh. "But as it is I'm deaf to anything but business," and she laughed again precisely as he would have her laugh. "The defeated Government are getting it hot and heavy. Poor things, for all their sins I'm sorry for them. It must be dreadful to be sent packing, and abused like pickpockets to the bargain. They ought to have had the sense to go sooner. But humpity-dumpity's down at last. Papa starts this evening for Beltingham. So do we. And then lead on, Macduff."

"We'll get Mr. Dudley in," observed Evan.

"If not the world will crack with somebody's rage."

"If zeal meant victory, he'd be Premier to-morrow," said Evan.

"Fair and soft, gentlemen, as Don Quixote observed on recovering his wits. We might come to grief if we drove the chariot of the sun. But we'll manage our tandem. Papa will make as good a member as most."

"I'm all for honesty, Miss Dudley; 'as good as most' are not the words."

"There you speak," she cried delightedly.

She flitted about him, buoyant and irrepressible, as he

sat at breakfast, and he took occasion to change the subject.

"You were at Henley," he remarked abruptly.

"Oh!" she cried with an added touch of colour. "And so the little bird has been tale-telling. Yes, I was at Henley, and you ought to have been there too. The Eights got a splendid ovation. It made me envious. Why can't girls tackle the world and take honours and things?"

"I am no hand at conundrums, but I happen to know a thing or two."

"Among them?" queried Florence.

"That those who never get a chance, somehow contrive to make and unmake kingdoms, annihilate parties, make swords clash, break and mend hearts, chain willing captives to their chariot wheels."

"Angels come unawares. I had no idea we entertained a poet," she responded, blushing in spite of herself.

Her father bouncing in at the moment caught her in the act, but was none the wiser, his mind being fixed on other things.

"I am very glad to see you," he cried, seizing and wringing Evan's hand. "Well! here's a pretty kettle of fish." And he beamed as if such kettles of fish were of all things in the world what he relished most.

"I congratulate you, sir, on your decision," said Evan.

"Thank you, and thank you still more for laying your own affairs aside and hastening to me so promptly. We shall require all the help we can get. Old Bearston retires. Bicker, Q.C., who opposes me, is a formidable antagonist. They say he has the devil's own grip and a tongue like a razor. Besides, he has made his mark in the House, while I'm a novice. You'll have to provide me with powder and shot, and do some of the firing as well. We'll do our best to bury our steel in the bosom of Gath. We're at home in Beltingham, among our own people, and Mr. Bicker may find that means something. Have you finished breakfast?"

Evan answered in the affirmative.

"Then you'll have a sleep."

Evan thought that unnecessary, and forthwith the two turned to letters and telegrams and the plans of the forthcoming campaign. It was to open on the morrow.



CHAPTER III

At the end of five weeks Mr. Dudley and his supporters returned upon a full tide, bravely carrying their shields. Days and nights of unbroken moil and toil, of abuse, haranguing, heckling, brought the meed of hosannas and tar barrels. After a maidenly display of coyness and some pretty coquetry, a seductive indifference to put the wooer on his mettle, Beltingham jilted the law and gave its heart to Mammon, partly, perhaps, because of a natural bias for cash, but chiefly because the accepted suitor was known as a citizen of approved worth and liberality. To him, indeed, more than to any other, Beltingham owed its proud position as one of the chief cities of the Midlands. As Mayor, he had purged its municipality, raised its credit, eased its taxation, reformed its police, given it pure water, clean streets, and sanitary dwellings; also, after a stiff tussle with tape-belted knights of Officialdom, law courts and an assize. He had received and entertained judges and illustrious strangers (a prince of the blood among them), directed and presided at civic functions with a distinction that shed lustre on his fellow-citizens. These services Beltingham now requited by giving him a term of its political affections.

The contest was one of the hottest that "old hands" could remember, and to the last moment excitement and speculation ran high. Now Bicker was up, now Dudley, again the balance trembled, so that backers, torn by conflicting passions, scarce knew whether to bet or fight. At last, in the small hours of a dark night, Evan dashed from the City Hall, leaped into a cab and made for Blairgrove, where Dudley, forced to break the usual rule of candidates, awaited the result. The whole household was on the look-out, though pretending to be calm and comfortable on tenterhooks. Florence, quick of ear, was the first to hear the rattle of the cab, and was out while her shout of welcome was still ringing.

"The news," she cried, as Evan sprang up the steps. "The news; quick, quick!" and she knew the fury of impatience which throttles.

"The world need not crack for somebody's rage," he

answered. Then spying Mr. Dudley behind: "The day is yours, sir, by a clean majority of a thousand."

Florence executed a pirouette in the hall, and Mrs. Dudley was under a vehement impulse to embrace the bringer of glad tidings. The victor's emotions, however, had to be guessed from the flashing of his eyes and the quivering pallor of his face.

"That's good," he said, with a long-drawn, half-stifled breath. "Well! well! let me thank you at once. You have worked like a Trojan and watched like a lynx. Without you I had been as a man with one limb."

"It's done, sir," replied Evan. "May I congratulate you?"

"When you are going through the same ordeal," said Mr. Dudley, in a voice not quite under command, "as you will be some day, call upon me."

"And upon me," chimed in Florence, every lineament of her face dancing and beaming. And only an abnormal power of self-possession preserved Mrs. Dudley from calling out, "And upon me." Her face partly expressed what her tongue was too well-bred to utter.

As they stood thus, a tumult of cheering was borne to their ears, that tumult which is as rich wine to the heart of the successful, and poisoned daggers to him who has failed.

"They're coming," observed Evan, running to the gate. "It's got wind; they're coming."

And presently there rolled upon them the turbid procession of constituents, with musical instruments of horrific power, with whoops and chants of victory, and seething, brazen-lunged elation. Mr. Dudley appeared on the balcony, and the pressing throng went hoarse in his honour, and, as it appeared, partly mad. It surrounded the house like a besieging army, it sang with no regard to harmony, it danced, it sent hats and fire-crackers up together; finally, in a passion of adoration, it laid hands on the member-elect and bore him off to the tune of "See the Conquering Hero Comes." At the central offices he was to have an opportunity of showing his gratitude and justifying his election.

Evan delayed his return to Pitweem. There was much urgent work to be done after the election, deferred questions of finance to be tackled, letters of congratulation to be answered, deputations to be received and sent off in good humour, voters to be patted on the back and encouraged to believe themselves the sole arbiters of England's destiny.



Almost literally from dawn to dusk, and generally far into the night, Mr. Dudley and Evan were hard at it, directing, promising, palavering, digging and delving in mountains of scribbled paper, and in bed they dreamed of sleek ghosts, proud with the pride of the enfranchised, crowding to exhort, extort, or enlighten. Glory, in fact, was beginning to press on the nerves.

One morning as the pair sat down before a sackful of letters and papers Mr. Dudley lay back in his chair a trifle wearily. On the previous night he had heard the midnight chimes at his desk, yet had been forced to bed with a load of arrears on his conscience. He looked at the heaped-up table with a feeling of dismay, and then glanced at his companion beginning nimbly to slit the envelopes. *He* at least was vigorous and undimmed. An idea, which had for some time lain vaguely in Mr. Dudley's mind, took concrete form. His cares and responsibilities were increasing at a rate that was appalling. Politics and finance were proving a more and more complicated game. He needed a confidential assistant, if one so cared to put it, a private secretary, of energy, tact, and ability. There was no need to speak of Evan's qualifications; would he accept the post? The question of remuneration might be passed without discussion, and the necessities of a student should not be forgotten. The position, Mr. Dudley ventured to think, had its advantages. To mention the most obvious, it would bring the holder into touch with public men and public life. The prospective barrister could draw his own moral.

Evan returned thanks in surprise and some degree of embarrassment. The benefits, he owned, were such as ambition would clutch at, and Mr. Dudley had named but the least of them. Yet there might be disadvantages. "Would it not," he asked, frankly, "be unwise to sacrifice the future to the present: in other words, to intermit his studies for the Bar?"

"Not only unwise, but absolutely suicidal," declared Mr. Dudley. "But why should you do that? As many of the twenty-four hours as you may find necessary shall be allotted to the law. You shall be judge in the matter, and in pressure for examinations, the secretarial duties, and not the studies, shall be suspended. Don't suppose," he added, in response to more words of gratitude, "that I'm a philanthropist. Probe deep enough, and you will find most virtues

resting on a basis of selfishness. I make the proposal because I know your head will save me a deal of thinking."

So the compact was made. At luncheon it was announced that Evan was private secretary as well as law student; and in the course of a week Justinian and his fellows were despatched to the South in a deal box.

CHAPTER IV

THE onerous duties of a legislator kept the Member for Beltingham close at Westminster. In his maiden speech he had tickled the House by pricking, with remarkable deftness, a bubble blown by the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was continually under the shadow of that first triumph. Astute Parliamentarians will assure you that nothing is so ominous, some even so disastrous, as an immediate success on the floor of the House of Commons. You may pluck success out of failure, say the knowing ones, but the reverse process is fatal; and they are fond of the pretty illustration of the rocket and its stick. Mr. Dudley speedily made it evident that his power of wing was not exhausted in that first flight, but it was a good deal more than child's play to keep aloft, or in the words of his fellow-members to live up to expectation. The feat required constant alertness and a sleepless activity.

The secretary's share in the achievement, if less conspicuous than the principal's, was hardly less arduous. Not only had he to keep a vigilant eye on shifty politicians at home and abroad, to sift speeches, press marrow out of Blue Books and Board of Trade returns, and in exigencies supply the pith of great arguments, but to conduct with less and less aid the huge and often extremely delicate and complex financial correspondence. The relations to his patron, indeed, suggested the part played by Burke to Rockingham.

"What would you advise here? You understand this: let me leave it in your hands:" "Mr. Kinloch will attend to that: please consult him;" "Florence, my dear, see Mr. Kinloch about this, he will unravel it," were forms of speech which came with increasing frequency from Mr. Dudley.

Many amazing things came to light in that time of press-



ure. Though cultivating the *nil admirari* rule with some success Evan was astonished, at times dazzled, by the transactions in which he took part. They suggested the dreams of some wild romancer, the "Arabian Nights," "Monte Cristo," and caverns of gold, rather than sober fact. He marvelled how one brain could have conceived, elaborated, and set in motion a system which embraced the material interests of the entire globe, a financial cosmography, so to speak. Not less wonderful was it that, having perfected, one mind should control such vast and varied activities, and being given to speculation, he more than once asked himself what would happen if the forces thus called into being should turn, like rebellious spirits, to rend? There was need to hold the curb tight.

The beginning had been almost bashfully modest. In its early days the British Consolidated Investment Corporation was but an insignificant affair, confined in operation to an infinitesimal section of the Midlands. Perhaps the projector had not understood his own capacity; perhaps he did not realise the wealth that thrifty England had stowed away in well darned stockings, awaiting a fit investment. At all events the thing grew and prospered as by miracle. Widening its scope, it added "International" to its title, annexed London, shook the Stock Exchange, overflowed into subsidiary companies and corporations, and presently extended beyond sea, ever absorbing, ever growing. There were affiliated societies in the United States, in Australia, on the Continent of Europe, resulting in such prodigious operations that by-and-by the lifting of a little finger by the British and International Consolidated sent a thrill of commotion through the money markets of the world. There were fortunes made by simply hanging to its skirts, by blindly following its lead in labyrinths which only the privileged could tread with security. The slightest nod from its managing director was as the hint of an oracle to thousands of piously watching men. For Leonard Dudley made conditions with great bankers and powerful Ministers of State.

The headquarters of the parent concern remained in Beltingham. There the directors still met, to manipulate millions with the easy lightness of wizards, to declare dividends, and congratulate shareholders on their luck. Thither Evan often travelled to fetch and carry balance-sheets, to enlighten Mr. Dudley's fellow-directors, and sometimes to

gratify them by pretending to seek their advice. But it was oftener asked than taken, for Mr. Dudley had Napoleonic notions of government. *L'Etat c'est moi* might have been his motto, so imperiously he held the helm; and had it come to a pinch, remonstrances would probably have been silenced with the reply, "*Tel est nôtre plaisir.*" His success, however, kept grumblers dumb.

Evan was also much in the City, in the precincts of Capel Court and Throgmorton Street, where the sons of Mammon most do congregate. He arranged meetings, learned the pleasure of speculative millionaires about new projects, conversed familiarly with bankers and brokers of percentages and contangoes, of "banging" and "rigging," of "bears" and "bulls," of conversions, corners, and pools, of gilt edges, watered stocks, and other deep mysteries of finance. He had likewise to receive and dispose of bores, and sustain sieges by rapacious creatures of corruption, the blood-suckers of the bucket-shop and the pavement. Could he get the ear of "the guv'nor" for this little scheme or that? What was to be the next move? Would he confirm or deny certain rumours?—in a word, would he give a tip and share the spoil?

"Yes," said Evan once, turning upon a notorious buzzard, "I will do myself the pleasure of mentioning your request at the very first opportunity, and depend upon it will tell the 'guv'nor' to have nothing whatever to do with you or any scheme with which you may be connected. And I beg of you to note for the future that thought I may appear to be simple I am not to be pumped."

"Blue diamond," remarked the man, grinning at his companions, and turned to other game.

For the convenience of capitalists desiring to transact business at their ease it was sometimes part of the secretary's duty to dine at palaces where all save the trifles of meat and drink seemed a dazzle of the precious metals. Thus he grew familiar with the worship of the golden calf. Did "the saffron-gilded pomp" startle his Puritan conscience? The ardent devotion of the elect to their gods in closet and temple may have astonished him. But for the present he was much more concerned to observe than to moralise; so he merely remarked to himself that gold is the Holy Grail of the latter-day Crusader, and that the way to the New Jerusalem lies *viâ* Capel Court.



CHAPTER V

He saw with a kind of awe the reefs and breakers through which the daring financier steers; and with an ever-increasing admiration he noted the perfect seamanship which piloted invaluable argosies safe along a course strewn with hideous wrecks. There were times when Mr. Dudley's glance was as the glance of a magician, so unerringly it divined hidden forces, interpreted dim probabilities, saw the haven through the storm. A hundred times in the space of a few months had Evan held his breath over crowding perils, and as often felt his pulses bound as the threatened ship, rising lightly, topped the surges which engulfed others apparently as seaworthy, and at last, at a dexterous touch of the helm, swung merrily across the harbour bar, every sail trim, every spar intact.

The situation was vastly to the secretary's mind. Ardent, active, imaginative, he relished with an unspeakable relish the glow of great enterprise. Brilliancy was both meat and drink to him; talent he admired to idolatry. Perhaps he did not as yet concern himself with motives. With a head abuzz with tales of the deeds of conquerors and empire-makers, the Cæsars, Alexanders, Napoleons, he adored conquest. A little dazzled by his love, he was unable to judge men and things quite philosophically, for philosophy comes of adversity and tribulation and old age. The momentous fact that mediocrity rules the world, chains by mere force of impassivity the flashing chariot wheels of Genius, was not yet graven on his mind. He reverenced wisdom, yet it is doubtful whether he would not sometimes have preferred Alexander drunk to Socrates sober. He would have bowed to Moses expounding the tables of stone; he would have rushed to Joshua's side in the taking of Jericho.

It was not that success sanctified questionable exploits, for he revelled in a forlorn hope, thrilled over a glorious sacrifice. So long as the odds were heavy and bravely met defeat had all the glamour of victory, and a spice of deviltry was a delicious condiment. He loved courage, movement, colour, the swing and rhythm of life where it beats hardest and fastest. Did he exult in the pride of a joyous

strength? Did Apollo rejoice in his beauty? He regaled his soul on enchantments, and youth and a heady atmosphere perhaps begot a kind of lyric ecstasy. For he stood where the humming dynamos keep the wheels of the universe spinning. Politicians at St. Stephen's, financiers in the City, the joint governors of mighty England, were equally within his charmed circle. It was his privilege to study them as one studies a piece of delicate mechanism. He was not always lost in admiration; and on occasion he entertained Florence with satirical accounts of the manner in which ingenuity raises the wind and popular government inflates the lungs, as in days gone by he had diverted her with mimicries of Red Sandy.

He peeped too into the glittering *salons* of Olympus, the Beulah of gold and gems, of enigmatical smiles and shrugs, of elegant scepticism, stifled emotions, dandled lap-dogs and imperious lacqueys, which lies west of the great desert of Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. A swift and keen observer, he made many jottings on the tablets of his memory, and was buoyantly in his element.

Too much in his element it was suspected. One day Mr. Dudley inquired how Blackstone and Justinian were faring and hinted a fear of neglect. Within a week he had his answer in the announcement that the negligent one had carried off a Council Studentship of a hundred guineas tenable for three years—three hundred guineas swept from under the noses of five hundred competitors, and the fifty pounds which the Temple adds to the honour by way of encouragement.

"Astonishing fellow," said Mr. Dudley to his wife, marvelling more over the doings of his secretary than over the achievements of the cloud-compellers at Westminster. Later on he asked Evan himself "How on earth did you do it?"

"Mostly when others were asleep, sir," answered Evan.

"Mostly when others were asleep?" repeated Mr. Dudley. "That is how Napoleon won his battles." And thereupon he doubled the prize.

Some evenings later there was a dinner in Park Lane, at which red-faced Benchers and great Q.C.s, relaxing over wine, examined, cross-examined, complimented, and counselled the student.

"Don't get top-heavy," said one, solemnly wagging an

Olympian pate. "Much learning, sir, according to the Scriptures, made Paul mad."

"*Licentia Vatum*," cried his neighbour. "Let a case be stated for argument."

The Olympian eyes rolled quizzically.

"You were ever a heretic and unbeliever," retorted their owner. "Nothing but a clinching judgment convinces you. Well, well! take care you don't some day get more than you bargain for. Look out for the great assize. In that Court, if all tales be true, it'll be summary verdicts and no appeal."

"That is getting unpleasantly personal," put in another, expansive with success and good humour. "*Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus*"; and turning to Evan he warned him not to expect too much. "The law's a stiff field to plough," he observed, "since the ladies have left us, I may say a demned stiff field to plough. When you're tugging at the devil's bit remember I told you so."

Evan bowed gratefully, promising to bear the pleasant prediction in mind.

"And," chimed in Mr. Quinton, an eminent Bencher at his elbow, "when you're ready for that agreeable enterprise you'll give me the pleasure of moving your call."

And as Evan again smiled and bowed his thanks, some one called out about smoothing the primrose path, whereupon the table broke into a roar. It was an exquisite jest to remind lawyers and politicians of the fable by which theologians earn a living.

Thus law and politics and finance gaily kept step together to springy measures which were in themselves an incentive. The eating of the essential dinners went on, and presently there came reading in chambers. That drudgery was borne with the grim patience of a harnessed bear, rebellion lurking in the dumb submission. "Battening on curdled asses' milk," was Evan's own account of the business to Mr. Proudfoot. Precedent became his *bête noir*. The past enveloped him like an icy shadow; the leaden feet of defunct jurists were as nightmares on his chest. But he struggled valiantly on, drawing conveyances and pleadings and writing opinions with the gravity of a Chief Justice and a poignant sense of futility. His drafts stuck fast to essentials, and were so much appreciated that he got most of the difficult cases, which he treated as religiously

as if the briefs were handsomely backed in his own name.

The position was not without reliefs and compensation. There were social asides, delicious ever-memorable half-hours stolen from business and the importunities of bewigged ghosts. Then Florence perhaps sang to him, or disputed with charming railleries about poetry or the last fashionable romance, about art, religion, folly, frivolity, and the world in general, holding her own most securely when she was furthest astray. Those were the only contests in which Evan did not care to have the best of it. He smiled when contradicted, and went on listening with a soul rapt in delight. If she were minded to pursue the exercise he could endure for ever.

Of late his vision had undergone a process of purging. Hitherto unimagined things were looming seductively on his inner eye. Haunted by dim feelings of a mingled pleasure and pain, he caught himself dreaming at high noon and in the stress and roar of prosaic business. Pictures of a feminine divinity rose on parchment and foolscap, obliterating momentous matters of the law, and, despite a sound brain and digestion, sleep forsook him. He gazed at Florence with a strange intensity, telling himself that she was surpassingly beautiful, and wondering who the lucky son of Adam should be.

Her charms were indeed in full bloom. The golden-brown curls, which had tossed so finely on the braes about Pitweem, were now lustrously dark, drawn back and looped enchantingly in a low Grecian coil that set off to perfection the shapeliness of a superbly poised head. Flowing from a full, high forehead in shining ripples, they might still, in certain lights, suggests a sunlit peat burn; and there were always vagabond strands and ringlets which, refusing to be confined, rioted in fantastic grace, apt symbols of a fetterless freedom. There were dimples in the chin and the cheek, stamped in the latter by much laughing, some one said. The tall figure combined the supple lines of girlhood and the budding fulness of womanhood. The curves of girlhood lingered also in the chiselled face, alive with animation and an energy which overflowed in a thousand unconventional channels. Time had brought much and taken a little, but left some things unchanged, among them a bewitching originality and waywardness which might easily

become caprice. The mouth had a sort of trembling piquancy, with hints in the flexible, sensitive lips of an abundant capability to curl suddenly in anger or scorn. The eyes were such as no man could look into and forget. A poet beholding them might have thought one moment of tropical midnights, and the next of laughing Italian skies. The thunder and lightning no less than the soft summer smile lay in their untroubled depths. Perhaps she was herself least aware how the elements of comedy and tragedy were mingled under that bright crown which was the pride and glory of her maid. Evan often watched this thing of radiance with a kind of pang, a pain that he would not have forgone for all the bliss of Paradise. Whose should the prize be? Whose? Whose? His heart thumped wildly, and his whole being burned at the question.

Meanwhile the law had its due. He passed triumphantly through the hands of the conveyancer, the Chancery barrister, and the special pleader; winding up with his chosen sphere, the Common Law Division. Then one day his name appeared on the screens, and Mr. Quinton moved a call. Certain formalities, with treasurers and others, were observed, an autograph was added to the rolls of the Queen's Bench Division, and by the laws of England Evan Kinloch was a barrister and gentleman. He took it as a good omen that, outside the little world of the Middle Temple, Florence was the first to congratulate him.

CHAPTER VI

As the solicitors of England did not pounce on the new member of the Bar, his secretarial duties were not immediately interrupted. These grew heavier as time passed, for Mr. Dudley gave an increasing devotion to his country. It was whispered he was ambitious of office. Perhaps so. At any rate, the financial operations which extended by virtue of his name fell more and more to the guidance of others. Thus his secretary was left to wrestle alone with knotty problems save when the ubiquitous Florence slipped in to help or hinder, as might be the mood of the moment.

Her pretext was interest in business, nor was the interest feigned. She had all her life been her father's chum. Schools and teachers had imparted knowledge, but he had shaped her mind, directed her taste, given her an appetite for affairs, and she repaid him with idolatry. Among all the paragons of chivalry there was none comparable to her father.

"Did you fling yourself headlong upon him, mother darling, the first time you set eyes on him?" she had asked.

"What a question, child!" exclaimed her mother, with startled eyebrows.

"Don't be scandalised," pursued Florence. "Were ten such men to ask me, I'd marry them every one and laugh at the law. If the ancient idiot objected, I should pluck his tangled old beard till he growled assent."

It lay in her to laugh at the law and pluck venerable beards.

She drew inspiration from great sources. Adoring the heroic, she had actually been at pains to master the history of a long line of heroes, ancient and modern and of many climes. The taste was a dangerous one in a world but ill provided with means of gratification. Disappointed, it gave edge and trenchancy to a natural disdain for the commonplace. Not infrequently when a perfumed gallant, "brave with the needlework of Noodledom," joined her train with obvious notions of conquest, she abashed him with the Corsican's query, put with inscrutable drollery, "What have you done?" And the exquisite creature, answering after his kind, would stammer that his vocation had always lain in valorously refraining from doing. For all such she had one humiliating look, and when they felt it upon them they took their way, unable to comprehend why the salt of the earth should be affronted. The goddess never descended to explanations.

Another besides her father was fast rising to the height of her high standard. The consciousness of this caused fits of abstraction, much impassioned meditation, and some blushes. The feeling, she knew, was no girl's whim, no vagrant fancy come and gone like a strain of music or a wandering wind. It nestled at the roots of her being, and was old enough to be intertwined with memories of heather and broom, of clover and rasps, of brawling streams and braeside climbs and other far-off happy things.



The immediate effect of the discovery was to render her a puzzle of eccentricity. For days together Evan had but vanishing glimpses of her. Then, as he sat in dreary vacancy trying to find reasons for her cruelty, she would suddenly break in upon his blackness of darkness, bringing the brightness of azure spaces, and chattering and laughing with a rush of gay ineptitudes till he was drunk on delicious frivolity. Philosophy might wag its hoary head and say its wise say, but here was the true wine of life. Nothing else induced the same divine intoxication, nothing else made the world march with so brave a rhythm. In such moments their eyes would meet and melt into each other like points of flame, causing confusion and hot flushings. When that happened Florence would turn and run away as unceremoniously as she had come, leaving him with sensations he could not name.

A vague unrest seized upon him. His duties were exacting, yet he found time for spells of reverie and desperate outpourings of lyric verse, shameless imitations of Burns and Byron and Shelley, of Heine and Swinburne, and the love-stricken Elizabethans.

"My love is like the red, red rose," was a haunting model. Again the lyre was often struck to the tune of "Maid of Athens" or "When We Two Parted," and there was a fresh version of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"—why, the writer might have been puzzled to explain.

These things, flung upon paper in the panting midnight, perished in the morning, for the sun is a cynic in matters of sentiment. So Celia never learned how passionately she inspired the Muse, nor how rhymes were wrung and tortured in celebration of her beauty and goodness.

Reading alternated with writing. He turned to his masters the poets to ease his wound, and found it the more inflamed. This might be taken as symptomatic of disease in the blood, and the ailment was certainly aggravated by the fact that he was precluded from seeking advice or sympathy. To keep seal upon a seething breast is an experiment not without danger. One day as Mr. Dudley was chatting affably with his secretary, all at once the thought rose in the latter: "In case of—would you oppose? By all that's holy, if you did—!" But it was instantly crushed down as traitorous and unworthy. For Mr. Dudley was congratulating him on having earned his first fee and won

applause. An Old Bailey affair it was, and a case of flagrant ruffianism, in which justice was perverted by a too ingenious advocate.

"If ever yer wants a job done neat, sir," whispered the model of virtue with a cynical grimace as he was stepping down to join his brother ruffians, "tip this 'ere cove the wink."

"I'm sorry I've done you an unfairness," responded Evan. "But keep up your heart: another time we'll make amends." And sure enough a Judge that was to be hanged him.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Dudley was absorbed in statecraft, and Mrs. Dudley, as a lady of fashion and the wife of a prominent politician, had the diversion of church work and charity. The mission was seriously accepted. Awakened somewhat suddenly to the fact that "the lower orders" had souls to save and bodies to feed and clothe, she explored foul streets, distributing alms and sympathy to the wretched, pleading timorously with the wicked, consulting curates, vicars, bishops and other orthodox persons about the regeneration of the fallen, and fetching infinite sighs over sinners who wantonly declined to be coddled into grace. Unhappily for a hungry and erring world, she was often laid aside with headaches, the results of evil smells and obstinate wickedness, so that what with public good and private ills Florence was left pretty much to her own devices. Her father and mother did not consider she ran any risk. Now and again, when forced by pressure of affairs to let her go forth under Evan's escort, they confidentially owned her need of a brother; but they ever fell back on the thought that she could probably make shift to manage without one. "Florence has discretion," they would say to themselves; "she will do nothing indiscreet." And it was assumed as a matter of course that her notions of right and happiness were precisely as their own. So the older generation expects an inhuman wisdom in the younger.

Having studied arduously under mop-headed, fierce-eyed

foreigners, Florence was an accomplished musician. She loved poetry too; could quote apposite passages from Coleridge and Keats, and dipped without yawning into Wordsworth and Browning. Moreover, she knew her Shakespeare, not only from assiduous attendance on the play, but from zealous reading. Even the commentators failed to damp her ardour for the creator of Imogen and Rosalind.

Her favourites she discussed with her father's secretary, and her face would shine when he brought out a meaning which had eluded her, explained an obscure reference, or dwelt upon some noble thought rapturously expressed. As time passed he introduced fresh stores, snatches of the classics, pieces by late or contemporary English and Continental genius, Tennyson, Swinburne, Browning, Goethe, Hugo, Carlyle, Ruskin, chosen, where there could be doubt of fitness, with unerring tact and delicacy. Romance added its fascinations.

"I like Tourgenief," remarked the fair critic after a course of such reading. "But why do the Russians not petition Providence for new names? I have to stop and walk round them or trip, a nuisance when one is on pleasure bent. Tourgenief has the secret of vitality. Bazarov is magnificent. His snubbings would be more grateful than most men's flattery. That Anna Something-or-other ought certainly to have married him."

"He was unlucky in love," observed Evan.

She cast him an arch look.

"And is it such a dreadful thing to be unlucky in love?" she asked lightly, turning away her face.

A curious burning sensation shot through Evan's chest and throat.

"To some natures the most dreadful thing in life, I should think," he answered with an effort. "Bazarov, you notice, made a miserable end."

"Ah!" she cried, catching at the point as if for relief. "Perhaps all giants do. Strength endures long and suffers. If you want to die easily don't be a giant. Great men have difficult endings; your ever-ready memory will supply instances in abundance. Tourgenief follows Nature, and so Bazarov dies hard. Common people have happier exits, the snail perhaps happiest of all. Yet I would rather suffer in the going off than exist a nonentity."

"Ho, ho! so you are ambitious?"

"And you are not," came with a merry laugh. "My Bazarov, take care."

She professed a fervid admiration for Thackeray, singling out Beatrix for special honours. Evan affected to shake his head over the enchanting Trix.

"What would you have, sir?" demanded Florence. "She was not born for a convent or the martyr's crown. The common world was Paradise enough for her. She liked excitement, splendour, fine gentlemen, and her own way. Do you presume to blame her? If so, sir, pray what do you know of feminine nature?"

"I am learning," he answered humbly.

She rose hastily, blushing a little, and made him a stately bow.

"I wish the student speed in his interesting studies," she said, and tripped from the room.

By such devious routes they came upon the old ballads and the Scots songs; that is to say, upon elemental nature. To one who had mastered German the Scots dialect was insignificant, and Florence took to the wild Northern bards with the zest of an eager temperament tasting new sensations. By some subtle method of her own she discovered Evan's tastes and remembered them both in singing and playing. The Scots songs she sang with a delicious winsomeness that ranged freely from the gay banter of "Duncan Gray" to the poignant pathos of "The Four Maries." Uncouth vocables seemed endued with grace and aërial lightness, as if they underwent a refining process on her lips; her very stammerings were piquant with hints of alien elegance and daintiness. Though her preferences in music were for the classic, she enchanted Evan's barbarian ears with pibrochs and strathspeys, vowing however, they had just as much suggestion of melody as the rattle of a tin kettle. Others shared the opinion.

"What in the world makes you play such horrid pieces, my dear?" cried her mother once, thinking of flight or cotton-wool.

And with a sidelong glance at Evan as if to say, "You hear that?" Florence answered laughing, "A horrid instinct of perversity."

The next moment, as if in urgent compunction of conscience, she had run up and was passionately embracing her mother. "You sweet darling," she said. "No imp of the



perverse whispers in your angel ear: sermons and good deeds and saintly men. I sometimes fear Heaven will not be good enough for you."

"Hush, child, hush," panted Mrs. Dudley. "Was there ever such a girl?" she added, smoothing her ruffled lace; as Florence, running back to the piano, broke into a coronach that was as the wail of eternal woe.

Presently Mrs. Dudley remembered that she had letters to write about a forthcoming charity meeting, organised under the patronage of "women, priests, and peers"; and the two unexpectedly found themselves alone. There was an embarrassing pause. Florence glanced at Evan, and, catching his eye, instantly averted her own. She played a few bars of a fashionable opera absently and hurriedly; then a Highland air still as if mind and fingers were far apart.

"Don't you think," she said, wheeling suddenly and facing him, "that mother is very good?"

"To vouchsafe us this chance?" was the reply that rose to Evan's lips, but what actually passed them was a murmured incoherency about assurances on a thing so manifest being mere impertinence.

"The dear soul is wasting herself in charity," pursued Florence. "I tell her so in odd moments. And do you know that I cannot help suspecting that her excellent clerical friends play their own game. The Church remembers number one."

"It is a human institution and must be run on human lines," said Evan, struggling with a feeling that had nothing to do with churches.

"Run is good," cried his companion. "Run is admirable. Yes, the Church must be run on human lines. Our bishops and archbishops, our ecclesiastical managers and charity organisers understand that, don't they? Worldly failure is the Church's Sheol—isn't that the new word? What a splendidly human being is our friend the Pope, in spite of his aversion to ladies. He could give the shrewdest man of the world tit-for-tat. Tell me, is he chosen purely as a fount of holiness, or merely for his business capacity?"

"Partly for both, I suppose."

"Ah! our old friends policy and piety," she laughed. "Serpent and dove joined in holy matrimony. Ideal. Do you know I should like to be Pope."

"And be mewed like a felon in the Vatican," suggested Evan.

"Fiddlesticks! I should make a triumphal tour of Christendom; travel like an emperor, give State audiences, receive obeisances and hold out the anointed toe to the adoring millions—so long as the toe didn't get tired. When that happened the millions would have to find other means of adoration. But mark you, men should get to their knees; that's the great thing. Oh! the Pope is your true Grand Sultan. Beside him princes and prime ministers are children with drums and rattles. He alone wields real power; and in face of Holy Writ power is sweet."

"It is a sweetness which queens as well as popes taste," said Evan, with flutterings which he could hardly control. She chose to ignore the impassioned tone and the meaning which shone in his eyes.

"Yes," she responded lightly; "queens are popes in their way. There was Cleopatra, for instance; but she owes her potency to Shakespeare. I believe in my heart the gorgeous Egyptian was an ugly puffed-out virago, thick-lipped and heavy-faced; and fancy calling a woman with thick lips and a heavy face beautiful. Octavius wasn't fascinated. Even invested with the magician's charm her beauty is that of the tempest or the abyss. Would you care to have her for a wife? But there, there," she added quickly, blushing and laughing together, "that was a *lapsus linguæ*. What I was wondering is why our greatest painter missed the English Elizabeth. Now there was a woman worth immortalising."

"The divinity was perhaps too close," responded Evan.

"There you are again," cried Florence, recovering her self-possession. "'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view.' Poets will be——"

She paused.

"What?" said Evan.

"Poets," she answered. "Don Quixote could not only charge a windmill and imagine a tavern a castle, but fall in love with a cabbage-stock."

"Poets are often fools and bunglers, feigning what they don't feel," said Evan, with a tumultuous breast, "it is *not* distance that gives enchantment to the view."

She turned abruptly to the piano, running over the keys in an aimless and confused manner.



"Do you know what I think one of the very best of the glorious Elizabeth's sayings?" she remarked, venturing to glance at him again.

"What was it, pray?"

"Why, when some foreign grandee proposed marriage to her, she replied she didn't want a husband to sit among the cinders. Was the presumptuous foreigner ever more delightfully snubbed?"

"It was cruel and unqueenly," was the response.

Florence cast a swift look round as if in perplexity.

"There's a forest here, as Bazarov says," she observed. "Where were we?—Oh, I remember, with my mother. We prate of the fanciful and forget the real. In spite of popes and potentialities I wish I were like her. After all there is but one true religion, to 'do good deeds, not dream them all day long.' She would rather die than do wrong, while her daughter——"

She struck the piano, issuing presently from a chaos of noise into an air of Chopin's.

He rose and moved towards her with the feelings of one choking in a fiery sea; he was both burning and suffocating. His head was spinning. He saw Florence and the piano as in a luminous mist; yet there was the celestial throb in his veins, and he moved on. She was perfectly aware of his coming, though she did not look up. Drawing near he paused, gazing at her as if eyes could pierce and devour. She felt them hot upon her, fought against the impulse to turn, bent over the piano, struck a few chords savagely; then all at once wheeled. Their eyes met, and every vestige of colour went from her face. She was being whirled whither she knew not.

"Her daughter," said Evan, with dry lips, as though she had just spoken.

"Her daughter?" repeated Florence, trying to collect herself. "What? Oh, yes!——is not worthy to unloose her shoe-latchet." And once more her fingers flew furiously over the keys.

"I will not permit you," interrupted Evan in a voice of electric intensity that reached and thrilled her despite the tumult of the piano.

She turned upon him, catching her breath.

"You will not permit me?" she said, half in dismay, half in defiance. "Pray, what will you not permit me?"

"To traduce the woman I love."

The words were as the blast of a trumpet. She started up, quivering, as if to fly. He caught her trembling hand, and they came together as steel and magnet, heart against heart. So they stood for one nameless second.

"Florence," he whispered, bending over her face. "Florence, my soul, my immortal soul!" And in a blind rapture he kissed her.

She attempted a protest. It failed, and he kissed her again and yet again.

"Oh! Ev—oh! Mr. Kinloch!" she panted at last. Managing to free herself the next moment she fled, leaving him as one struck dumb and motionless. He stared for a minute without winking in the direction in which she had disappeared; then rallying himself, followed her. Going along a corridor he met Mr. Dudley, jubilant after a speech in the House.

"I expected to see you in the gallery," cried the great man, saluting his secretary. "You are pale. Not unwell, I hope?"

"Not unwell, sir," said Evan.

"Well, your arguments have gone home. They were clinchers. Come into the library and we'll talk about it." And into the library accordingly they went.

CHAPTER VIII

THE parliamentary season came to a close, and Upper London poured abroad and into the country. The Dudleys went first to Beltingham and then to Granvorlich, where, as the chroniclers of fashion reported, Mr. Dudley entertained a large house party for the grouse shooting. Evan remained behind in London; but the Long Vacation and his patron's appeal for help presently sent him also northward. Even among the remote Logieburn hills the managing director of the British and International had no peace because of the importunities of "fishers in the black pool of Agio." So Evan was summoned to keep the stream of

correspondence flowing. Investors and speculators little knew how thew were made and unmade by a word spoken in Highland solitudes; nor did they in the least guess the influence of a private secretary's finger upon the course of their fortunes. Not once nor twice a "yea" or "nay" from Evan's pen-nib quickened the beat of hundreds of hearts and diverted thousands sterling. It was never found that he made a mistake.

The party, a brilliant one, included several people whom Evan knew in London and Beltingham. In particular there was his friend Mr. Quinton, rosy, fatherly, oracular, full of wise saws, shrewd advice, and pleasant prophecies. Being no sportsman, indeed, barely knowing, as he declared, which end of the gun was meant for the shoulder, this eminent Queen's Counsel did not follow the dogs with a consuming enthusiasm.

"When a covey rises," he told Evan, "I blaze away as a matter of course, trusting to luck and the providence of sportsmen. Sometimes to my surprise a bird drops, and then the keeper comes running to me with a 'That will pe a fery goot shot, sir,' and I look into the honest fellow's face, wondering whether I have imposed on him or he is practising on me. For there's cheatry somewhere. But Lord!" he added, pursing his mouth, "what were law and lawyers without it? Odd to think we thrive by roguery. Villains are our best friends, unless an exception were made in favour of the fools."

"A hard saying, sir," returned Evan.

"Honour among thieves," said the experienced Mr. Quinton. "There's this peculiarity about lawyers: that among themselves they occasionally speak the truth—in jest as it were. They know as well as most folk how to take a wink from a blind eye. Now, when we go to breakfast with the Lord Chancellor he says fine things about morality and justice and so forth because they're expected of him, and a Lord Chancellor cannot afford the luxury of a scandal. But we all remember the *cum grano salis* rule, and no harm ensues. Were honesty to come into fashion we should change our occupation or starve. So the world is encouraged to wag in its own agreeable style while clients think we're striving might and main for the Millennium. By the way, I was tickled by the ingenuity with which a certain young friend of mine turned black to

white the other day. Don't trouble blushing or explaining: need a man who has been a quarter of a century at the law be told that it's the barrister's business to tar or whitewash according to need? He laughs in his sleeve at the golden-mean precept, serving all purposes that he may suit his own. My young friend, I noticed, won on the logic of facts, all the while well aware, of course, that facts are of all things the most illogical, except perhaps——"

He paused, smiling.

"What?" said Evan.

"Johnny Calvin's tophet," answered Mr. Quinton. "The illustration is furnished by yesterday's sermon. Your Scotch parsons are champion fire-eaters. Well! well! thank God I'm a bit of a philosopher after all. And I haven't waded breast deep all these years among this world's virtues without discovering at least one truth."

"And that is——"

"That great is the art of forensic thimble-rigging. Your common juggler is a clumsy creature compared with the skilled performers in her Majesty's Courts of Justice."

"I hope, sir——" Evan was replying.

"Oh, no! I beseech you, don't hope," broke in Mr. Quinton. "Hope is only a little less fallacious than fact. No philosopher hopes. The present and the actual are enough for him. He sucks his toffy and swallows his physic with equal grace of countenance. The lures of fancy are an abomination to him. And yet, so oddly are we constituted, I sometimes like to reckon probabilities. I think we shall soon be electing my young friend a Bencher."

Evan laughed.

"That hope may also be fallacious," he remarked.

"One of Shakespeare's omniscient clowns observes that what's to come is still unsure," said Mr. Quinton, "but the odds of a thousand to one are sufficient for any sensible gamester. Yes, I think we shall soon be electing my young friend a Bencher."

Mr. Quinton was greatly given to these chats, in which he poured himself out upon life, death, happiness, and the vicissitude of things with a gay irony that was as delightful as it was deceptive. At fashionable dinner-tables he was valued for his conversation, and as he liked to dash it with pessimism, he was credited with more than the



average bitterness of success. But his friends were ready to testify by oath that if the rind was at times tart the core was as sweet as June heather. Insatiable of good talk, it easily lured him from sport. Often he would escape from the moors of a sultry afternoon on the whimsical pretence that the red tongues of dogs hanging low in the heat had uncomfortable suggestions of hydrophobia, and, inveigling Evan to some mossy or heathery bank in the shade of resinous larches, would discourse vividly upon a world which interested him mightily in spite of affected weariness or indifference. The fact is he was never weary or indifferent. In his brain fermented the ideas of a universe. One of the first half-dozen men at the Bar, he had the edge of a new lance; it was but touch and cut. Yet, notwithstanding a subacid temper and a withering power of scorn, no one had a quicker eye for worth or a nicer regard for whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. A humourist, he enjoyed the rôle of spectator and critic; but when he girded his loins for battle, that is to say, tugged a trifle viciously with his right hand at the nape of his gown, the enemy had cause to look out. His professional brethren understood that unconscious jerk and sat up expectantly. It was then that terror fell upon refractory or equivocating witnesses; for when they fancied themselves on adamant suddenly he would open an abyss at their feet, and, as they shuddered on the brink, the glare of the tightly screwed eyeglass and the concentrated eagle-face completed their confusion. The rest was disaster. Even judges, it was whispered, were at times afraid of him. Solicitors certainly were; but such was his winning way with a jury that they steadfastly besieged him, and his fees were what he chose to make them. Loyal to his cloth, he believed in big figures, yet had been known to plead a widow or orphan's cause for pure love of the thing. On the other hand, he had flung a brief marked with a fabulous fee in the bringer's face. Hence he got a name for eccentricity.

Unprofessionally he was a traveller, a reader, and a student of the devious ways of men. Like Evan, too, he was a double first of Oxford, and loved that place of dreams with an idolatrous love. From the university he carried away a brilliant reputation, a taste for things of the mind, and, yet more precious, an affection for his contemporary and son of his old master, Arnold of Rugby,

which later differences of opinion or sentiment only made the stronger.

One of the great moments in Evan's life was when one evening in the midst of a band of clerics at the Athenæum Club, and with a pretty testimonial in three words, his friend presented him to the embodiment of the classic spirit in England.

"A son of Oxford and my own Balliol," said Mr. Arnold, looking kindly into the boyish face, "your name is not new to me, sir. I hope you will not allow the law to put an end to the work begun in the city of enchantments, as I like to call her."

"Give your soul rest," put in Mr. Quinton, "I have most earnestly warned Mr. Kinloch against hope."

"Adorable cynic," observed Mr. Arnold, "who would hide the sun in his bosom and give mortals light and heat by stealth."

"Sweetness and light," returned Mr. Quinton in a tone of raillery. "Oh! when do you intend to put the public right about the origin of that phrase, Arnold? Look out for the genial Jonathan and his dagger on the other side of Charon's ferry. And, by the way, you are a victim of the glamour of the Celt; Mr. Kinloch is an out-and-out Gael, can confound you in the pristine tongue of Ossian, which, I learn from certain philologists, was also the tongue of Adam. I know nothing of those deep matters, but doesn't tradition aver that the old gentleman, feeling dry, asked for a dram in Gaelic, and failing that slaked his thirst with an apple? I wish he had minded what he was about."

"Incorrigible!" murmured Mr. Arnold, with a placid smile. Then turning to Evan, "You are Celtic?"

"In every drop of my blood, sir."

"Ah! then it runs warmly. You know Renan?"

"I have read him on the Celtic races," replied Evan, "and I supplemented him with 'Lectures on Celtic Literature.'"

Mr. Arnold was evidently gratified.

"I will confess," he said quickly, "that that is a matter which lies very near my heart. We English have men and guns and ammunition, a gigantic commerce, and an inexhaustible common-sense. But I make myself a bore by repeating that we lack distinction, charm. The Celts



have that. The English sky is brass and iron; the Celtic has clouds and sunshine."

Evan bowed.

"The Celt, however," pursued Mr. Arnold, "has, as the French say, the defects of his qualities. You remember Renan's verdict?"

"That the Celt has no talent for government?" said Evan.

Mr. Arnold nodded.

"Bismarck, sir, taught French officials German. We'll correct that notion."

"Excellent," cried Mr. Arnold. "Excellent! There speaks the conqueror." And he took possession of Evan for a *tête-à-tête* which the great man speedily turned into a brilliant monologue.

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Quinton to Evan as they walked away. "I have never seen Arnold more animated or interested. What if he turned you for a little into Carlyle's passive bucket, and pumped away regardless of your feelings? Such pumping is worth enduring. Well! if he should be a poet and a bit of a preacher he's a capital fellow, much misunderstood like the rest of us, but genuine as steel or granite, for all the cackling of geese. Mark you, he abnegates for sake of conviction. You'll find that rare. Were he something more of a courtier his purse would be heavier, poor fellow. His liberality, believe me, is amazing. In general you will find professional authors jealous, puling, purblind creatures who view the world through bits of smoked glass of their own manufacture, turn green at the thought of rivalry, and quarrel with the Almighty for being universal. Now Arnold fronts life bravely, owning that it takes all sorts, good, bad, and indifferent—especially the indifferent and the bad—to make a world; and he has really a very fine tolerance for the foibles of Providence. In an age of omniscient babes that is much. He is all for joy, too."

"My old friend and master, Mr. Proudfoot, likened him to a Grecian sky in winter, clear but chilly," remarked Evan.

"Faith, a poet's figure," said Mr. Quinton, "but in this case false, decidedly false. When next we go north you shall bring me this man to be converted."

Accordingly the dominie was brought. The fight, for which, be it admitted, he was at some pains to prime him-

self, was conducted with great spirit on both sides. It was, indeed, reckoned the finest display of dialectics ever witnessed in those parts, and it did not lessen the interest that it was the dominie who hauled in his colours.

At the finish Mr. Quinton gave his hand, hoping for the honour of further acquaintance. The dominie answered chivalrously that the honour was entirely on the other side, but was careful to add that some of the matters touched on had still to be threshed out.

"I'll have a word with you some day about Homer," he cried: "you dropped several heresies by the way," and took his leave in a glow of enthusiasm. Victory or defeat, it had been a glorious experience for him.

"God's sake! and you've to contend against men like yon," he said to Evan almost in pity, "what must he be in his own field when he beats me in mine? I'm glad I'm not at the English Bar."

"You ought to be, sir," returned Evan.

"Ought to be?" repeated Mr. Proudfoot. "Laddie, laddie, you must not be sarcastic on me in my old age. He could twist me round his little finger, the easier, I do believe, the further he was from the right. A man of gigantic parts and nimble as lightning; has all the arts of fence at his finger-ends. Tell me why don't they make him a judge?"

"Because," replied Evan, with a meaning look, "he cannot afford to accept it. His income is twice that of the Lord Chancellor."

"So, so!" said the dominie, gripping his chin. "Your popular pleader has to do a sum in division when they clothe him in the ermine of the Bench. I never thought of that."

The day of the great Homeric battle came, but Mr. Quinton's heresies, if they ever had existence, vanished into thin air before trial. All suavity, concession, and compliment, the lawyer sorely disappointed his antagonist. The dominie had dreamed hotly of drawing blood for his idol, and lo! the other was as idolatrous as himself. There was nothing for it but to clap sword in scabbard and embrace.

So the two brought up with mutual cordiality under the blue sky of Greece, each striving to outdo the other in homage to the "prince and master of all praises and virtues,

the thrice sacred Homer." Thereafter Mr. Quinton spent many a long summer's day in discourse with Mr. Proudfoot, and the local postman was greatly puzzled by the number of letters, bearing the London postmark and a crest and motto in an unknown tongue, which he had to deliver at Burnside.

"Some of the dominie's rich freends have found him out," he said knowingly to the neighbours. "I think it'll be the doin' of David Kinloch's laddie, him that's learnin' to be a lawyer."

Among other Highland acquaintances of Mr. Quinton were David and Jessie and Neil and Lisspeth, and Pitweem was jocularly garrulous about Evan's boyhood. Mr. Quinton was not surprised by Neil's tales. "Kinloch," he said laughingly, "keeps wonderfully true to himself. He would still go through fire and water, still tackle wild bulls and vicious horses, and it might be even disobey orders on occasion." Then turning to David who happened to be present. "You have the honour, sir, to be father to the most promising man at the English Bar. He will be famous before you know where you are." And David being completely overcome could but murmur a reply about thankfulness to God.

"Do you know," said Mr. Quinton to Mr. Dudley one evening after a visit to Pitweem and Burnside, "I have been revolving a curious problem."

"I thought nothing perplexed the brain of a lawyer," was the response. "What's the problem?"

"Whence came the stuff that makes your secretary? Don't strike in with the findings of science in heredity. My point is this: does Nature go on storing materials through a countless series of undistinguished generations to burst into flower and fruit in a single individual? If so, by what strange process of chemistry does she do it, and why? Does your biologist or physiologist explain her reasons? I must cross-examine Huxley on the matter. As touching Kinloch, I can discover nothing to account for him, nothing, though I have watched closely. A long line of simple peptic country folk I take it, very respectable, pious, and ignorant, and then on a sudden this keen-edged intelligence. Is it a cast of 'sport'? I have arrived at an age when even lawyers moralise and—well! there are hardy men who might shudder if they knew their destiny. In

spite of a seeming improvidence of effort, Nature does nothing for nothing. Do you twig me? But there," he added gaily, "I put you to the trouble of thinking, and that's no occupation for a holiday."

Socially Mr. Quinton had sacrificed to the Graces. Early in his career he had captured a season's belle, and now at seven-and-forty was not only an eminent Q.C. and a Member of Parliament, but had the felicity to be father to one bright boy (destined for his own profession) and two charming daughters. At the moment they were all on the Continent, while he, under pretence of shooting grouse, played mentor to Evan.

"I have been through the mill," he would laugh. "You are just getting among its teeth. Or shall I say with Socrates that I am a traveller who has been a journey which you have to make, and can tell you whether the way is smooth and easy or rough and difficult?"

On a grouse moor all men are equal; yet the company numbered one whom most people treated with a certain instinctive deference, the deference which the world yields to untold wealth. Godfrey Langham was five-and-twenty, an only son, personable, and a millionaire. The elder Langham, one of Mr. Dudley's many right-hand men, had just decided to enjoy an evening of peace and leisure before being gathered to his fathers, and the vast financial interests were bequeathed to Godfrey, who took the trust blithely. The young man had got manners at a public school, had passed in due course to the university, not from any love of learning, which, indeed, as a man of spirit he despised, but because it was "the proper thing to do." There he developed a taste for society and graceful athletics, rowed fitfully, played a neat game of tennis when he chose to give his mind to it, danced divinely, as more than one blushing partner whispered in his ear, hunted, spent money like a prince, dressed to please his tailor, hatter and shoemaker, took flattery without a grimace, and for the rest was untroubled by ambition. He grew accustomed to the academic process of "plucking," but by a miracle of good luck finally took his degree "at the first shot." In his modesty he would have overlooked the achievement, but his father, in honour of an event so unexpected, held a great reception, at which Godfrey accepted congratulations with the *sang froid* of a veteran satiated with glory.

A little later he marched upon the world as upon hereditary possessions, with music and banners and the huzzas of a great retinue; and here he was affably trying his father's shoes. If they were too big for him he never complained of a misfit, and it was nobody's business to inquire whether he filled them.

Among aristocrats and men of substance he was the soul of good-fellowship; genial, well-bred, conciliatory, and on occasion generous. How many ten-pound notes he had lent to expectant peers and impecunious younger brothers he never cared to reckon. His friends knew that Langham was always "good for a loan," repayable at convenience, that is to say, at the time of the Greek Kalends. With some hazy notion of business, imbibed at the paternal knee, he took I.O.U.s for the amounts so disbursed, but he cheerfully inscribed them with the word "never" in his boldest hand and tossed them into a drawer to gather dust. Periodically they were burned as rubbish without the knowledge of the debtors; for he had his recompense in noble companionship. In his bearing towards the rest of the world he remembered that money is money. With Evan he quietly marked off a distance proportionate to difference of rank, the distance that divides a grandee of commerce and a penniless private secretary. Evan had to confess that the thing was not done insolently; nevertheless the thought made the Celtic blood burn. Once, and once only, Mr. Quinton detected a dangerous spark in his young friend's eye and quenched it with a jest. But there were matters of which even Mr. Quinton had no inkling, matters that kindled fires of torment. Mr. Langham was markedly attentive to Florence, and was plainly encouraged by her father and mother. To them, indeed, nothing seemed more fit or natural than that capital should be consolidated.

What was to become of Evan?

CHAPTER IX

"FIRE that's closest kept burns most of all"; so Evan was proving to his cost. Action, hitherto his cure for most ills, was plainly forbidden. The touch of circumstance, erstwhile so potent a spur-stroke to heroism, now merely galled an open wound. Hercules, born to hurl mountains from the way, had to gnaw his heart in passive endurance, a torture ten thousand times worse than all the wounds and pains of battle. In the mist of uncertainties in which he stood to move were perhaps to trip, and to trip were to precipitate disasters he would give his hopes of redemption to obviate. So, praying for light, he bore without grinning, and was studious to mystify observers.

He had not been alone with Florence since that night of transport and tumult when she fled from him with a panting cry which haunted him like an accusing conscience. What did that cry mean? What the quick ebb and flow of colour and the wild heart-beats she could not hide? Did she resent his passionate word and act? At times he told himself "No," again the answer was an agonising "Yes," and neither could be accepted. In company she met him with an unreadable face, the face of a sphinx dissembling with gaiety, of one could imagine such a stooping of the inscrutable. To onlookers her manner gave no hint of embarrassment in his presence. That was a comforting omen. But why did she vouchsafe him no token, and in the name of the seven wonders, why did she suffer the inanities of gilded imbecility? There was the rub. To be sure, she sang "Oh! whistle and I'll come to you, my lad," as it seemed to his thirsty ears, with a note of yearning invitation. But it was easier for poets to rave than for lovers to act, easier for girls to set hearts a-thumping than for gallants in these debased times to emulate Lochinvar. Civilisation has the defects of its qualities.

At times he laid the flattering unction to his soul that she lingered over his favourite "Willie's gane to Melville Castle" with undeniable tenderness, and that at the lines

> Willie's young an' blithe an' bonnie,
> Lo'ed by ane an' a',

"then glanced her dark eye on the king" with a meaning which a duller wit than love's could not misinterpret. Yet again he found something personal in the stanza, sung with inimitable drollery—

> Then ben the hoose cam Lady Bell;
> "Gude faith, ye needna craw,
> Maybe the lad will fancy me
> An' disappoint ye a'."

Was this her token? With the puzzle racking heart and brain, he began to suspect himself of infirmity of will. Why should he not put his happiness to the hazard? Fortune truckles to those who are not afraid of her—to those who make opportunity instead of sitting down to wait for it. Under this inspiration he wrote innumerable letters in the midnight silence of his room, tearing them up feverishly when written as shallow, rhetorical, inadequate, impertinent. At last, however, he produced two sentences on which he resolved to stake his fate.

"If I have offended past forgiveness let me have sentence; if aught of hope remain will you walk alone tomorrow afternoon at four by the corner of the black wood where the Altmohr falls into Loch Dhu? And may time make speed."

The missive was put into Florence's hand as she was passing to her own room for the night, her maid being the bearer. Entering her chamber without pause of step, she held the letter for a moment as one who dallies with a great secret; then tearing it open she read with well-feigned indifference, and when done thrust it quietly out of sight. Her face told no tale.

The maid, a garrulous cockney, performed the rites of the toilet with fragmentary remarks upon things in general and professional references to shining hair and mystical matters of the wardrobe. Florence, pleased to be so entertained, threw in an odd word to show she was appreciative and a woman. She even condescended to jest about losing her attendant, whereat the smirking maid was overcome with amazement.

"I was afraid you would be remaining behind to keep a cottage fireside bright," said Florence. "Don't you think a Highlander would make a good husband if you caught him young?"

The maid sniggered with a toss of the superior cockney head. "Her young man, thank 'eaven, was in London, footman, comfortable sityation, perkeesits, day hoff reg'lar, talked the Queen's Henglish and dressed like a Christian."

"Make him happy," rejoined Florence. "And, by the way, how do I stand for walking dresses? If to-morrow afternoon is fine I may take a long walk. My mistress of the robes has put vanity in my head; how will she turn me out?"

A list of dresses was given with elucidatory comments, and silver-grey was the choice. Then Florence spoke of weariness.

"You will make haste," she said. "I feel a little tired to-night."

The maid, finishing presently, went her way and the door was locked. While the rustle of her skirts was still audible her mistress was re-reading the letter with a hot face and a marvellously brightened eye; and when, after long meditation, she went to bed it lay under her pillow.

"Dreams are fantasies," she told herself. "Well! for once, just for once, I'll hug a sweet superstition."

The trysting-place was distant from the hall door of Granvorlich Lodge but a short half-mile. The house stood on a little plateau on the edge of a spruce wood and fronting Loch Dhu, a sullen sheet of water which seemed to brood dire things in the lone depths of the hills. In tempestuous moods, when the storm fiends charged piping and shrieking down the defiles, it lashed the windows with spray, or mingled its foam with the swirling snowdrift, augmenting the fury with missiles of ice. In the sunny September weather it laughed in spite of itself, though the good humour had something sinister and cynical in it. There was ever a hint of death in the bright ripple, a blue tinge as of deadly steel. But the pebbly beach, washed by immemorial waves, shone radiantly as Florence in the crisp morning traced its magic line westward to the broad gleaming mouth of the Altmohr. There the beach abruptly became banks of trees that hung forward as if lost in contemplation of their own images in the water below and rocks that rose austerely in standing defiance of the loch's utmost rage. Sloping skyward, the woods lay like a shining olive mantle; here and there they smoked; but the frayed and tattered mists were vanishing like remnants of

draggled and decayed fripperies, leaving an untarnished brightness.

Leaning out of her casement, elbows on sill, chin buried in hands, Florence drank deep of mountain incense as she followed the watercourse in its bosky windings upward through the forest till, in lofty solitude, it twinkled on the grey channelled face of a height above. For a minute her eye wandered among the huddled peaks beyond; then returned swiftly till far down it rested on the lichened head of a solitary rock, just then touched with a golden glow.

"It may be at the foot of that rock," she said to herself, and hastily withdrew.

The shadows were already dappling Loch Dhu when she was free for her expedition. Mrs. Dudley with untimely solicitude discovered at the last moment that she must then and there have her daughter's opinion on several matters that "positively cannot afford to wait, my dear."

"I would accompany you," she said by way of recompense, when her perplexities were turned to noonday clearness, "for indeed, I think a breeze would do my head good; but you see how things are."

She cast a look of distress about the room as if "things" were ready to rend her at the bare idea of neglect.

Florence kissed her with fervid tenderness.

"Mother, darling, can you guess how you resemble Martha?" she inquired.

Her mother could not.

"Because you are cumbered about much serving, and careful and troubled about many things. Promise me to try how the world would wag for just one half-day without your vexing yourself about it. As for me, I will avoid bog holes, and there is nothing else, so far as I know, to be afraid of. There are no lurking gallants, you know, nowadays, to make one a ready captive against one's will."

"Upon my word, child, one would almost imagine you regretted the fact," returned Mrs. Dudley. "What in the world puts such ideas into your head?"

"I cannot conceive," answered Florence with another embrace, "but there they are. When you were young one might still ride on the crupper blowing kisses to the friends who remained behind or tried to follow. Such follies are now out of fashion. We wouldn't be unfashionable, would we?"

She glanced at the clock; it was half-past four.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, " see what a march time has stolen on us. If I tarry longer, sweet mother, it will be a tramp by the light of the moon, and that might be awkward among heather and peat hags."

She made off with a mantling colour, calling good-bye over her shoulder.

Outside she hesitated for half a second as if considering her course; then turned in the direction of the Altmohr. Her mother watching her with lively pride thought what a handsome picture she made in the close-fitting grey and the sailor-hat and eagle's feather.

"A charming girl," whispered the maternal heart fondly. "No wonder Mr. Langham is smitten." And dreaming of bridal flowers and music, the excellent lady sat down to her beggars, her churches, and charities.

Florence passed from her mother's presence with the lightsome mien natural to a young lady in perfect health taking an airing for pleasure's sake. But she was not out three minutes when her breast had the throb of a thousand pulses.

"Oh! what am I doing?" she asked herself in a spasm of white fear. "What am I doing?"

Being a woman she did not stay for an answer, though she was dimly aware of walking without volition. And, indeed, her agitation was plain in feature and movement. Her step, usually as firm as the click of a hammer, was nervous and uncertain, her eyes were on the ground as if scanning the pebbles for gold, her wits were off in a panic. In this riot of emotion she suddenly reached the Altmohr. Brought to a pause, she glanced rapidly about as if half dreading the capture over which she had so lately made merry. Her sense of the incongruous prevailed, however, and in sharp self-reproval for foolishness she turned into a tangly path by the burnside, making a prodigious effort to appear unconcerned and unexpectant. As she was thus rallying she heard a quick rustling, and glancing involuntarily ahead spied Evan coming towards her. Till that moment her heart never beat, never proved itself a traitor and rebel.

At sight of her Evan raised his cap, and she promptly dropped her eyes, trembling in a kind of hot ague and feeling that her face was a red flame. She would have turned

and fled but for some mysterious, magnetic force which held and drew her on. A sound of tumbling worlds and rushing waters was in her ears, yet through it she heard the murmurings of a low, familiar voice. Thrilling indescribably, she looked up, and lo! there was Evan by her side.

CHAPTER X

He was the first to find tongue, and his words were passionate thanks for keeping tryst. She turned her face upward to his, a bantering smile playing through her blushes. Now that the crisis had come she was herself again—herself, however, with a sweet, half tremulous, indefinable difference.

"You did not expect me?" she said.

"I was in purgatorial fires for a century," he answered. "You are late."

"And pray, sir, who said I should be earlier?"

"A tyrant who sent me here to wait your coming and kept me trying foot about on burning marl. Had he deceived me his empire should answer for it."

"Tyrants are hard to deal with," she laughed. "But as to deceiving, do you know that you are forcing me to study the art of deception? I have taken to masks and make-ups and the acting of little fibs like any dizened pretender of the stage. You chide for being late, while my wit was upon its mettle to devise a plan of coming at all. Mother was within an ace of bearing me company. Would you rave played the gallant to us both, like another Esmond? Nothing but the London slums saved you."

"Bless the London slums," responded Evan fervently. "Strange the way, our way, to Paradise should lie through Whitechapel. Out of the strong sweetness, out of the grimy bliss; isn't that it?"

He made as if to draw her towards him, but she gave a little start back.

"No, no," she protested with a deeper rose in her cheek. "Little birds may be spying."

"Do you care?" he asked looking down upon her as if there were but one thing in the whole wide world worth

having or heeding. "Let me say in the words of one you know well, 'If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this;'" and suiting the action to the word he kissed the hand that lay captive in his. She thrilled in every atom; but she kept her head.

"It's inconsistent in one out for fresh air to dawdle in a stifling thicket," she observed with an air of discovery.

"I know every foot of the forest," he returned. "Shall we explore?"

"I came just for a moment," she said, "and I must not stay."

Nevertheless she followed him in the narrow hunter's path into which he turned, ducking and curtseying with great gaiety when he thrust up a bough or held aside a tangle of undergrowth for her free passage. A spurt of ten minutes brought them out on a clear green spot, a misshapen mound thrown up in midforest, no man knew how or when, over which a great hoar rock stood sentinel.

Florence instantly recognised the towering grey head as the one she had noted from her bedroom window.

"Is it possible to get to the top of that rock?" she asked with a dancing eye.

"Possible, but difficult," was the answer.

"I have heard *somebody* say that difficulty is the whetstone of ambition. Show me the way to climb," she rejoined with the half jocular, wholly serious manner which told she was in the mood to take the bit between her teeth. Feelings that are hard to conceal must be dissembled by timely diversion.

The rock lifted a grim front, sheer a hundred feet in air, to a kind of shattered battlement that sternly forbade ascent, but at the rear the ground swelled in billowy formation, as if in the plastic era of the earth a wave had been caught and solidified, and there were clefts and crevices and spiky points which to sure feet and tenacious fingers might serve as stairs. Evan took in the chances with the eye of an expert.

"To slip might be serious," he remarked. "Will you venture?"

"Your hand," she replied, stretching out her own, and the next moment she had mounted nimbly to the first low ledge.

"Capital!" he cried, the spirit of the mountaineer alive in

every nerve. "But you must let me lead and do the pulling. I'm an old hand at the pastime."

"And did I begin yesterday, Sir Rupert of the Rocks?" she inquired archly.

"Not yesterday, nor yester-year," he answered. "You climb as the very genius of the cliffs. But all the same the genius of the cliffs must curb audacity. I am responsible for her safety."

The woods rang with a merry laugh.

"And who delivered her into your keeping?" she demanded.

"The one who of all the world has the best right," he returned. "So, you see, I must insist on being faithful to my trust."

He sprang higher up, reaching quickly back to aid his companion. She gave her hand with a glance at his face. It had the trustiness of tried steel.

"Grip," he said, tightening his grasp.

"The clasp of a man," she thought, as she went up without an effort. That was a right hand to depend on.

"You don't regret the enterprise?" he asked when she stood beside him. They were very close and their eyes met with the shock of mutual challenge. Long afterwards she remembered how his glowed.

"When you find me putting my hand to the plough, and turning back, ask again," was the answer.

"Better and better," he cried, making for the next point of vantage. "Now, will my Alp-scaler please be careful? The place is tricky, and it might prove tragic fun to trifle with fate on a Highland precipice."

Again he stooped, and again she was beside him, this time on the jagged edge of a fissure. Holding each other tightly, they laughed and looked up; and so in the ecstasy of forbidden things they clambered, till at last, blowing and crimson, they stood triumphant on the top. The luminous, aërial prospect from that high altitude was pure enchantment. Florence gave a shout of gladness at view of the spreading woods and the clustering hilltops in evening black and gold, with here and there a gleam of emerald or opal, and here and there a flush of rose or a redness of fire. The sun pouring through a gap in the craggy ridge caught the twain in a golden radiance, making them, as it were, sharers in the miracle of transfiguration.

Turning her face a little to the right to escape the dazzle of the sun, Florence observed a twinkling mote far aloft against the lonely infinitude of the northern sky.

"An eagle," explained her companion, on his attention being drawn to it. Then he noticed there were two. "A brace of eagles," he said "'soaring to their aëry towers.' Mark how true they are to the line. They aim high and go straight. And," he added, turning his eyes from the heaven above to the heaven of the face beside him, "they keep close together."

She moved round with an odd sensation, and looked down upon the eastern side. From the cosy bosom of the wood Granvorlich Lodge sent up its blue coils like a lazy smoker. Below those peaceful chimneys her mother was busy with charities. Dear mother, so good, so little suspecting! The eye went round in a circle, and lo! Loch Dhu was putting on its nightly gloom.

"Oh! see," cried Florence sharply, "how the shadows stretch on the loch. I must get back at once."

She swung about, took a step forward, then paused, looking over the beetling edge.

"What shall we do?" she asked, turning to Evan with something of real alarm in voice and manner. "How are we to get down?"

Evan peered over the giddy brink, reckoning the hazards.

"Trapped!" was his one word of comment.

"Oh! you must not say that," she cried, with a swift expression of terror.

"Would you lose heart if you were told that you are a prisoner upon an enchanted tower?"

"Please do not mock," she pleaded. "Say how are we to get down?"

"I will answer question with question. Are you angry with me for bringing you up?'

"I can be angry with no one but myself. The proposition was mine—I was the fool."

"Suppose I prove an ogre, and tell you that since I am master of the situation you must obey me absolutely."

"Obey is a hard word," she responded, smiling faintly: "what would my ogre have?"

"A promise never in word or thought to reproach the fool who brought you here."

"A merciful ogre to make such easy terms," she remarked, smiling with more heart.

"That's yourself that speaks. Now for the descent. The stairs that helped us up must help us down. I will stick to the rock like a limpet, and you—you will stick to me."

"I will stick to you," she answered, and Evan found a meaning to suit himself in the words. "But suppose you slip?"

"Then the law of gravitation will step in: we shall descend the quicker. You take the risks?"

"I rely on you," she replied quietly, though with rekindling cheeks.

That got him to work. To a son of the cliffs, noted in his time as a harrier of hawks' nests, the downcoming was less difficult or dangerous than it might seem to a stranger. None the less it cost Evan two well-scored hands and some damage to clothes to get his charge safe to earth, for he would not hear of any feat of daring on her own account.

Perhaps she was a little frightened, or the unaccustomed exercise may have made her dizzy. At any rate, when she leaped from the last crevice she swung full in his arms, brushing his cheek with her own. For one ineffable moment he held her close as a strong man holds a nestling child. He thrilled to the wild beating of her heart upon his own, felt the warm incense of her breath on his face, noted the flutter of the long eyelashes, and the look from under them that seemed at once full of appeal and trust. Her lips were Adam's temptation tenfold intensified. He bent his head, but drew back instantly in hot self-reproach. She was helpless: the apple should go untouched, so he set her gently on her feet.

"There we are," he observed, as lightly as if no gust of passion had tossed his soul.

"Thank you," she said simply, but her eyes told him that she knew and understood all.

"Oh," she cried the next moment, noticing blood on his hands, "you are hurt."

"It is nothing," he returned. "A rub in the burn, and all's right. The stains are not like Lady Macbeth's."

"I should be sorry if you were hurt," she said softly.

"For your sake?" he responded.

"Through my fault," she corrected. "Come and wash

them. Let me see," when that operation had been performed. "Are the cuts deep?"

"As wide and deep as pin scratches," he answered laughing.

"Well! we will never be foolish again," she said.

"Solomon is not my idol," he remarked. "I plead for more folly."

"Come," she said, moving off, "and learn wisdom."

The return was beguiled with humorous sallies about the scaling of rocks and the rescue of distressed damsels, Florence adroitly taking the lead. All at once a sense of lost opportunity smote upon Evan.

"I had something to say to you," he broke in abrutly upon a trill of laughter.

"You look serious," she returned, scanning his face. "Please don't say it now."

"You wish it so?"

She hung her head.

"Not now," she repeated in a low voice. And as he was going to protest, "Not now, I beg of you."

"At least leave me one crumb of comfort," he pleaded. "You will come again?"

She kicked the moss off a tree root; he took her hand as a suppliant waiting breathless for the word of fate.

"Would it make you very happy?" she asked, looking up.

"For God's sake do not play with me," he cried. "Happiness for me is where you are: torment everywhere else."

"Then I will come again," she said. "Now you must let me go."

He kissed the captive hand vehemently.

"There is one thing yet," he reminded her; "when will you come?"

"The time must be of my choosing," was the answer. "Oh dear! how late it is. Mother will be out with a lantern searching the bog holes."

She slipped into the darkness of a thicket, and there was a noise of rustling leaves and crackling twigs. A minute later he heard her hurried step on the gravel of the beach.

CHAPTER XI

A WEEK passed, a week of passionate dreams and racking dread, without word or token of fresh tryst. The sphinx, more inscrutably mirthful than ever, was an excruciating puzzle. What her mask concealed no man, least of all a lover, could divine, and there was never a whisper to tell what stuff the Fates were spinning. Only an occasional glance set hope and doubt in fierce conflict, and now the one was uppermost and now the other, as my lady appeared gracious or merely enigmatical. Evan would have gone headlong, risked all for half a chance to grasp the prize; Florence daintly stepped the tight rope of circumstance as if emotion never made the head light. There were moments when love's hot impatience and selfishness hinted she was cruelly dallying.

"She cannot help being a woman," said the waiting cynic bitterly, wronging all just thoughts.

That was when she was caught laughing with Mr. Langham as if his ineptitudes were the essence of wit and humour. For his part that young gentleman was certainly concentrating forces for a siege. Yet his manner was embarrassed. Though a perfect citizen of the world, and therefore well assured of the omnipotence of money, to say nothing of grace and distinctions of person, his gallantry at close quarters was purely sentimental. In truth, his wooing was conducted mainly on the plan of speechless appeal. He watched with a doting look, "raised profound and piteous sighs," seemed ever on the point of flinging a heart at sportive feet, and was for ever mischievously diverted. With odd inconsistency sacrifice and heroism ran much in his head, and he tortured himself with visions of his own captivating valour could he but bring back for a day the great time when men jousted and tourneyed for a lady's love, or won her smile by deftly "spitting a rival's body on a rapier-point."

Florence took his dumb, haunting homage with charming unconsciousness of motive; and her father and mother, prophetically putting two and two together, were well pleased

ing coveys in corries and glens, and Lo
wreaths of whirling spray. There was, I thi
sion that Florence had retired to her own ro
any rate, the need of haste and secrecy was ur

"Just two minutes," she intimated, panting

"You would give longer to Mr. Langha
Evan, unable in spite of a tumultuous joy to
reproach.

"I did not risk being blown to shreds to m
eyed monster," she retorted. "Mr. Langhan
docile of adorers, not like some one I know,
are barbed arrows."

"That some one——"

"Is a tyrant, sir, a perfect tyrant," she interr
ing and shaking a forefinger in his face. "Mr.
something of a slave."

"That, I presume, is why you are so agreeab

She stepped quickly back, making him a m

"I had no notion that I was under tutelage,"
"Had your highness but marked your roya
with me for being civil to others——"

He took her ungloved hands, and she was st
hot touch of his fingers.

"May I ask you one question?" he said, loo
eyes as if he would read an answer in ther
tongue could utter it. She nodded in a flutter c

"Are Mr. Langham's attentions

knew it would be futile to argue or protest, since she would laugh both logic and sentiment out of court. So he made a fair pretence of agreement.

"The authority is indisputable," he replied. "Yet it is as well to be accurate in these high matters. Ought you not to have said vanity rather than heart?"

"A lawyer must of course be a metaphysician," she remarked playfully. "Define me the difference 'twixt tweedledum and tweedledee. Heart or vanity, it's all one. A woman lives for conquest."

He bowed profoundly.

"And she accomplishes her destiny," he said. "Let the conquered own it."

He drew her towards him. She yielded with a pretty hesitancy, and in her look was the sweet confession which never yet needed the aid of words. As he bent over the half-hidden face and coy questioning eyes, her hair, swirling wildly in a flaw of the wind, almost blinded him; and perhaps it was by accident that their lips met.

Suddenly remembering that she might be missed, she made an attempt to escape, but he held her closer.

"Not yet," he said. "You would not put a moment's joy against an eternity of waiting. Why were you so long in coming?"

"Ask the caged bird why it does not sing in the tree-tops."

"Well answered; but you came at last with pleasure? Tell me that."

"I came with fear and trembling, sir," and a roguish smile parted her lips. "Is it a light thing to break half the Commandments at a stroke?"

"But you came with gladness also?" he insisted, thirsting for one word of admission.

"Perhaps I came for the delight of being blown to pieces by a tempest," she responded, trying to capture her tossing tresses.

"Don't," he cried, seizing the uplifted hand. "You are glorious. The winds consummate the charm. Medusa's locks or ever she incurred the wrath of Minerva," he ended in a rapture of admiration.

"Choose a happier similitude," she rejoined. "Medusa gives me the ague."

But the words came with an accent so little suggesting a shudder that he took leave to discredit them on the spot.

"Well, then, you unbeliever," she cried, all at once feigning concern, "think what I risk."

"I cannot," he answered, "for thinking what you are."

She seemed to nestle closer to him. Her hand trembled a little, though not with the tremor of fear; her eyelashes dropped; there was a radiant glow on cheek and brow. Yet when presently the matter that was nearest the hearts of both came up she remembered again that she must fly instantly.

"And not so much as a sign?" said Evan with a note of reproach.

She turned her cheek to him.

"No," he protested. "No. The cheek means nothing. Lips and heart go together."

And lips and heart went together, to be smothered in the palpitating embrace. The next moment he was alone in the soughing wood, his whole being thrilling as if a battery were at every nerve root.

CHAPTER XII

At the next meeting, which fate mindfully vouchsafed within twenty-four hours, the mutual understanding was complete. Florence's manner said so, and Evan passionately accepted the conclusion. For the present the compact was the darkest of dark secrets, a fact which did not at all diminish its sweetness to the conspirators. Both were too full of themselves, of each other, and the passing moment, to give a thought to futurity, save as a rosy horizon hiding Elysian Fields beyond. Feasting in Paradise, why should they vex themselves about prudence? Alone with her own reflections, indeed, Florence experienced qualms and agitations which seemed to presage trouble, but with characteristic vigour of will she strove to put them from her. Chance and circumstance, ever the allies of the bold and independent, would befriend her. In contact with Evan she had no mind for fears or disturbing visions. His words, his expression, the tones of his voice, his whole mien and bearing were to her doubts as the mountain blast to cobwebs: it breathes and they are gone.

Once sure of each other, they wasted little time in cooing, neither being of the turtle-dove order. At the beginning of the momentous interview, Evan, raising his companion's hand to his lips, like a knight dropped from a mediæval canvas, thanked her ardently for stooping to one of lowly estate; but as surely as he referred to sacrifice she spoke of glory.

"You know what I am and have been," he said.

"And knowing, dream of what you will be," she answered radiantly.

"Consider what you give up," he urged. "Mr. Langham is born to untold wealth. I have nothing, nothing but brain and right hand to aid me."

"And would you have me mistrust them?" she asked, playing with a button on his coat and pretending to chide. "When they fail I will make haste to repent me of my choice. Meantime," she added, with a look in her eyes upon which he dwelt many a long day afterwards:

> "'Thy love is better than high birth to me,
> Richer than wealth.'"

And with that she was enfolded in his arms, fain to be rendered breathless and speechless.

"My life for your love, Florence," said Evan, returning from heaven to earth—that is to say, loosening his clasp. "You have given heart and brain and right hand the inspiration they needed. I for you and you for me—for ever; none else for either of us. The millioned accidents of Time that 'creep in 'twixt vows and change decrees of kings' will not sever us. You are not afraid?"

"I am afraid of nothing with you."

"A king had never such honey on his lips," murmured Evan the next moment bending over the snuggling face. "Well, well," holding her off that he might feast his eyes, "we will storm the fortress of fortune together."

"Storm and conquer," she responded, lifting her head. "You and I, Evan, against the wide world, and fame the prize."

He did not follow in that forward flight.

"And you are mine," he said, revolving about the point from which he could not get away. "Truly mine."

With the glowing happiness which shines in a woman's

my sake, and would hang himself on the biddi
"His plan implies a sense of security," res
"I durst not adopt it."

But that was raising a problem that time mi
to solve. So, leaving Mr. Langham to the des
pointed lovers, they returned to themselves
secrets that were no secrets over and over agai
ing the course of their friendship from the
the beech-tree field to that hour of enchanted
confidence among the larch woods. Many a t
a mystic significance as each found how th
cherished remembrance of it, and thought wl
possibly mean. And as they talked, the dusk
about them, as if to insure a sweet seclusion. I
darkening aisles, Florence cried out suddenly th
be going.

"Not without one more assurance, my darli
Evan. "My heart's love, you are wholly mine,"
when he had got it. "Wholly, wholly mine."

"You need not stifle me for all that," she pan

"And when again?" he asked eagerly, disre
protest. "To-morrow?"

"Perhaps."

"It is fifty years till then."

"Tell Time to plume his wings and fly; tu
minutes, minutes to seconds."

"He should still be too slow," was the

another moment. The entire household will be on our track with mother distracted at their head."

"To-morrow, then?" he said, unlocking reluctant arms.

"If planning and praying avail," she answered, slipping into the shadows.

That parting was for ever written in the memories of both.

When she reached Granvorlich gate a favourite poodle that had been lying in wait leaped affectionately upon her. She took it up caressingly, and with a long-accustomed familiarity it lifted its nozzle to kiss her. But she thrust it off. "No, no," she said, "not to-night, not to-night."

CHAPTER XIII

THAT evening Evan rode to Aberfourie on business for Mr. Dudley, and returned late. Mr. Quinton, sauntering in the moonlight, met him with a long face and a significant manner.

"A word when you are disengaged," he remarked, after commenting absently on the poetic qualities of the scene.

"At your pleasure this instant," said Evan, alighting and throwing the rein to a groom.

Going at a venture in search of a quiet spot, they came upon the smoking-room, found it empty, and took possession.

"This refuge will do as well as another," said Mr. Quinton, locking the door, as it were, unconsciously.

Both fell into easy chairs with a studied unconcern, which ill concealed the impatience of the one and the embarrassment of the other. Mr. Quinton presented his cigar case, though well aware his companion did not smoke.

"Not even to-night?" he observed in a meaning twinkle, when the proffered cheroot was declined.

"You have given me an appetite for news, sir," replied Evan. "From our anxiety for seclusion I infer the intelligence is important."

Mr. Quinton dissolved in a fragrant blue cloud.

"It may prove so," came out of the mist. "For the moment all that can be said with certainty is that it is—well, somewhat awkward for me."

smoke with his right hand, "Mr. Dudley has
speak to you about a little matter that turne
absence."

"Mr. Dudley has hitherto done me the ho
municate with me direct," said Evan with a flu

"And I am sure will resume that confidenti
joined Mr. Quinton suavely. "But this affair
outside the usual routine, he thought of an i
Intermission is the business of lawyers, you k

"I think, sir, that neither of us loves circumlo
Evan. "I may guess your drift; but plain spea
merit of short shrift, it obviates suspense an
standing. Will you put me out of pain by co
point?"

"I thank you for clearing the ground," replie
ton with evident relief. "Well! what do you th
ham's gone and proposed to Miss Dudley: tha
you, is it not?"

Evan's heart stopped, and something appea
irresponsibly in his brain. The next instant he
feet, his fists clenched madly, his eyes flashing

"I knew you would be interested," said M
quietly. "I did not expect to find you excited.
sit down?"

Evan flung himself back in his chair; but
sooner down than he was bending forward wit
fierce and hungry eagerness

"And was that Miss Dudley's answer?"

"In faith it was not, and that's the cause of our interview. They reply was 'No' as point blank as if it came from the muzzle of a blunderbuss. Langham pleaded with surprising eloquence, I believe; did the Duncan Gray business over again with moving variations: fell on his knees (you know how he cherishes trousers), proffered hand, heart, fortune—in a word, himself and all that is his, for one word, one ray of hope: and by way of comfort, my lady, advising him to keep his feet, wheeled about and left him at his prayers. Mrs. Dudley found him. Pray imagine the scene for yourself. Mother and daughter were closeted together for one long tragic hour. Mrs. Dudley retreating in a crippled condition, called her husband to her aid. You know his influence over his daughter. It failed in this instance—utterly. She was granite. Finding expostulation vain, he fell back on authority, insisted on knowing whether there was any one else. 'My father has a right to know,' said she: 'there is some one else,' and named——"

"Whom?" cried Evan, unable to control himself.

"Faith, a very dear friend of mine," replied Mr. Quinton. "Pray have a look at him in the glass. Her father threatened, her mother fainted, the gallant Langham bolted, as it was feared with suicidal intent; but he was subsequently found in his own room sipping iced champagne to allay his fever. And to make a long story short, your humble servant was put in commission, and here we are."

"And what is the business of the commissioner, sir?" asked Evan, his temples throbbing as if they would split.

"That depends very much on my friend. They were all greatly shocked, as you may fancy. 'Never suspected, could not believe such a thing,' and so forth. And the question now is whether matters cannot be set quietly to rights."

"In other words, whether the chief delinquent will not show Mr. Langham a pair of clean heels?"

"It might be put in that way."

"I will ask you one question," said Evan, in a voice tense with emotion. "If you were in his place what would you do?"

"I was never much of a hand at puzzles," answered Mr. Quinton, stroking his chin. "Were I young I might give way to infatuation. It is perhaps impossible to love and be wise."

[illegible] sinks out of sight at the alarm. I tell you, sir, there was a time in this a man would have made his sword ring befc such conditions in connection with such a stal

He leaped up with glowing eyes and fac stormily about the room. Mr. Quinton watcl moment before remarking, "And be dirked chains for his devotion."

"At least he would be saved from the disg ardice," retorted Evan. "I am perfectly awar hind all this, and will spare you an unpleasant ing the objections to Miss Dudley's choice. I for being egotistical—I lack riches. My tailor no reputation; no banker bows double before rate on my own account. A lean purse, that and front of my offending. It is a fault, as I from those about me, that may be mended. W heard, fluctuates, changes hands. Were all thos the purple to-day born in it? Have they an inal to continue in it? I will not speak to you, sir, c tudes of fortune; but I do not distrust my star. Dudley has faith in me, may this right hand wi ment she finds her faith misplaced."

"If you heard such heroics in court, I think set Bench and Bar in a roar over them," ol Quinton.

"I take it we are talking as men, not as lawyer Evan. "And to bring our business

"And you would like to go back to him with the tidings that I had meekly hoisted the white feather?"

"My interpretation did not quite take that form," was the answer.

"You, sir, have been my very good friend," said Evan, as if the other had not spoken. "The simple statement covers a great deal; and of Mr. Dudley's goodness I need not speak. Do not imagine that I forget it or that I am ungrateful. When you return to him make him clear as to that. But were my indebtedness ten thousand fold what it is my response to your request and his would still be the same."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Mr. Quinton.

"I would spare you sorrow, sir, if I could; I want especially to keep your good opinion; but you would not make me less than a man. I will not prove false to feelings more sacred than life itself. That is my answer."

"Unalterable?"

"Unalterable."

Mr. Quinton rose and shook himself.

"It seems I have got my head in a bees' bike, as your countrymen say," he observed. "Yet I will not deceive you. Precisely the answer I expected I have got. I can but report it. In case the worst should come of it Mr. Dudley hoped he might see you himself. If you happened to be in your room, and he desired your presence here, you would come?"

"Mr. Dudley has never asked for me in vain," replied Evan.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Quinton, unlocking the door, "God help us all!"

CHAPTER XIV

WITHIN half-an-hour Mr. Dudley and his secretary stood face to face. Save for a significant look in the eye, an unusual pallor, and a noticeable compression of the mouth, neither gave outward sign of emotion. Mr. Dudley wore his habitual courtesy of manner; Evan's deference was punctilious; yet a blind paralytic would have felt the fixed

determination with which both men came to the encounter. It was the first clash of imperious wills; and the older man no less than the younger knew he had got his antagonist.

Mr. Dudley motioned Evan to a chair, at the same time taking one himself. Then without prelude he plunged into the business which had brought them together.

"I have heard with the greatest regret, Mr. Kinloch," he began, "your answer to Mr. Quinton in the matter in which he had the kindness to represent me this evening. I had hoped for a different reply, told myself you would recognise the absurdity"—"of your pretensions" he was going to say—"of the present situation" he actually said. "I am pained to find myself mistaken."

"Diversity of interest, sir, easily leads to diversity of sentiment," said Evan.

"I know you will spare me any sophistry," rejoined Mr. Dudley. "Let us talk for a moment as one practical man to another. This affair cannot yet be desperate. A little infatuation; some hallucinations at the full of the moon we will say; nothing that cannot be got over without injury to either side. I am getting old: experience, I trust, has not made me a cynic, but I have no fear of broken hearts. You catch my meaning?"

"Exactly, sir, I think," said Evan.

"That is well. I knew you would. Sentimental people sigh and shed tears over blighted affection. Well! I am of opinion that the blight is commonly in the imagination: a night of distress, some troubled dreams, morning sunlight, recovery, wonder, and forgetfulness—that's the usual course of the disease. Now I desire to say at the outset that I appreciate your position. There is no need of rhetoric and poetry to assure me that my daughter is one of the very best girls living. I am proud of her—in every way. You see I am a lover myself, I own it is perfectly natural you should like her—for her own sake."

"I hope, sir, you do not imagine——" Evan struck in sharply; but Mr. Dudley interrupted.

"I imagine nothing whatever dishonourable," he said. "You were in love. I repeat, it is natural you should like Florence. I will make yet another admission: it is not unnatural that Florence should like you."

Evan bowed, quivering from head to foot.

"Permit me to put in a personal word," Mr. Dudley went

on. "As Hamlet said to Horatio, there is no reason why I should flatter you; therefore I may speak now what I have long felt. Your character and gifts are exceptional. I have studied both. You have ambition, brains, attainments, force of will, health, address—all the qualities, in short, which enable a man to make way in the world. I have not the slightest doubt that you are on the threshold of a great career. Meanwhile your help to me is invaluable."

Evan was trembling with excitement. He had not reckoned on this mode of argument and it was disconcerting. The adversary who strikes you can meet with counter-stroke, but how are you to take him who, laying offensive weapons aside, plies you with praise that is absolutely sincere?

"I know perfectly well what you deduce from all this," pursued Mr. Dudley. "The qualities I have named are such as any sensible man would value in a son-in-law. That too I freely admit. Why, then, you will ask," and indeed in his growing excitement Evan was almost blurting out the question, "why do I not allow things to take a pleasant course? I have my reasons, with which, however, I need not trouble you. Nor if I can help it shall I press on tender places. I hold myself largely to blame for this unlucky passage."

"You take blame without cause, sir," said Evan, breathing very short and quick.

"It's a case of self-conviction," replied Mr. Dudley. "I was remiss in my duties as father. For one thing you enjoyed an unlimited privilege—I think I may call it that—of associating with my daughter. I was constantly busy. She has no brother, and I trusted you."

"You do not mean to insinuate abuse of trust, sir?" broke in Evan with a fiery flush.

"Between you and me there need be no recourse to insinuations," responded Mr. Dudley. "It will perhaps be sufficient to say that had I a son I should like his honour to be the pattern of yours. But that does not absolve me. I ought to have foreseen that the devil might tempt two impressible young people to imagine themselves irrevocably in love."

"You treat the matter lightly, sir," said Evan with a tight chest.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," returned Mr. Dudley. "I assure you I regret it with all my heart.

"The word scandal, sir, jars on that honour were good enough to speak," said Evan with the other did not fail to note. "You will do ı to remember that I am not alone in this matı Miss Dudley is so closely concerned, might I that she be consulted?"

"We will lay that proposition on one side, if was the austere reply. "Miss Dudley's fathei instance undertake to think and decide for l decision is to be taken as final."

Evan found it necessary to clap a tight curb (spirit.

"I am at a disadvantage," he said. "When sisted on having his pound of flesh he met en expostulations with the answer, 'It is my humoı made up is as a chamber with a barred door."

"A very happy illustration," said Mr. Dudley perceptibly about the mouth.

"If I have misconstrued, sir, I am sorry," said it seems I am denied appeal. Cæsar judging cause may have prepossessions."

"But Cæsar's lieutenant in like case woul them."

Evan had it in the face and it made him winc but a sense of its perfect fairness kept back th that leaped to his lips.

"I am glad, however," Mr. Dudley

Evan's pulses beat cruelly; his hands were clenched; it was with difficulty he kept his seat.

"Need I declare, sir," he asked with a painful thickness in the throat, "what I would do to anticipate even a wish of yours? I charged Mr. Quinton to tell you how I appreciate your goodness."

"And he reported faithfully," said Mr. Dudley.

"I will not presume to repeat the tale to your face," pursued Evan, "but you will permit me to say that nothing that can come can destroy or alter my sense of obligation. Whatever happens, let me not be accused of ingratitude. That is the blackest vice in the calendar, the devil's worst attribute."

"I never doubted your heart," replied Mr. Dudley.

"Then think, sir, what you ask me to do," cried Evan, slipping in the intensity of feeling to the very edge of his chair. "You spoke this minute of infatuation, a word of reproach and ridicule. If it be infatuation to be as clear about one's mind as about one's existence, to have every sense and faculty agreed like sun and sky, then indeed I am infatuated. I wish to avoid wild words which to you are as water to a rock. But——"

"We are getting into a discussion of feelings, Mr. Kinloch," put in Mr. Dudley, beginning to fear the rush of his secretary's emotion, "and nothing will be gained by debate. That, in the words of a favourite author of yours, would be merely feeding the wind and folly. The position is one of absolute simplicity. I am not unreasonable. For my daughter's sake, for my own, for yours, for everybody's, I am willing, nay, I avow myself anxious, to let bygones be bygones."

"If I thought Miss Dudley wished it——" Evan was beginning. But Mr. Dudley was no longer in a mood to listen.

"You must take me as representing Miss Dudley," he interrupted. "Mr. Kinloch the barrister needs no exposition of the law touching a father's rights and responsibilities. I particularly desire that the affair go no further."

"I am to make way for Mr. Langham?" retorted Evan, feeling as if he were on flame.

"You choose to provide reasons," said Mr. Dudley. "Since I am forced to be explicit, I desire your attentions to my daughter to cease and determine."

"Then of course you perceive it makes a
our relations impossible," said Mr. Dudley
ness of fate.

"I believe, sir, I am neither blind nor a
Evan.

"Very well. Since you will desire to make
rangements for leaving, a horse and trap ar
posal as soon as you are ready. For the futu
all prosperity, and as to the past accept my th

"You can scarcely wish me happiness, sir
struggling with a multitude of seeting feelin

"You can never be happier than I wish yo
Mr. Dudley, his tone softening to a sudden ten
lieve me I shall watch your career with unab
And now I must say good-bye."

He held out his hand, Evan took it instinc
it, and without a word hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XV

EVAN came to the interview determined at all
Florence before quitting the house; he retire
nothing short of actual violence

powers, he would make them all jump for it yet; and as he fiercely planned a siege there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Florence!" he said to himself, his heart standing still.

For the sake of privacy he had locked the door; the lock was stiff, and in his desperation to open quickly he nearly wrenched it off. When at last he succeeded and looked out, holding his breath there stood—Mr. Quinton. Evan recognised him in the dim light with a sudden sickness of disappointment.

"Oh," he exclaimed, telling by his tone he expected some one else. "Come in. It is very good of you to come to me." Then recovering himself, "Well, sir, the devil has us in a cleft stick this time. You see what presumption brings." He laughed a dry, bitter laugh. "I intend forthwith to pitch my tent in a cypress grove and set up as a philosopher, and my motto shall be *Cherchez la femme.* Or what say you to *Absque argento omnia vana?* Money makes the mare go. Eh, God, there's a great field."

"The waters of Marah will turn sweet again," observed Mr. Quinton.

"We have it on excellent authority that miracles will never cease," returned Evan. "Why, sir, one of these days brine may be without salt, and we shall have proof of the syllogism about a gammon of bacon quenching a man's thirst. The world changes as it grows wise, and there is no teacher like experience. I have just been to school."

"Another lesson?" inquired Mr. Quinton, feigning a lightness he was far from feeling.

"A great lesson," responded Evan. "*Non possumus* straight in the teeth. Oh, sir, these are stirring times."

"I am sorry that all is over," said Mr. Quinton, dropping his gay manner.

"You are ahead of me in your news," replied Evan. "I had not heard that all is over. The conclusion is perhaps hasty. We'll give the wheel another turn and see what comes up. *Vogue la Galère!* Fortune, they say, ever liked a cavalier wooer. So in the words of the old song,

> "'If it be na weel bobbit, weel bobbit, weel bobbit,
> If it be na weel bobbit, we'll bob it again.'"

"I know the temptation," remarked Mr. Quinton, scrutinising his companion's face, "but I hope my friend will do nothing rash."

ing was finished, "I have a kindness to ask
Dudley had the goodness to place a horse a
disposal for the flitting. For myself Adam's
serve excellently. But one cannot very wel
into a packman. There is the address: wi
friend see that these trifles are sent after me
comes?"

"After you?" said Mr. Quinton. "You su
wait for daylight yourself."

"That were to make a child of utter darkne
mony with his condition," replied Evan. "I
my native night." He stepped to the windo
aside the blind. "Black as Erebus," he obser
star, not a blink of light anywhere for the repr
much as the outline of a mountain. How
Heaven can be!"

"You had better wait a little," said Mr. Qui

"One would fancy, sir, you scented dang
Evan. "Trust a son of the moors in disgrace
bogs even in the dark. If bogles and evil spi
why, they will be company. Once upon a tim
man of mine taking a midnight airing among
countered the devil, and found him a gentleman
may be repeated. I must be off, sir, while y
enough. In going thus, I do not break bonds

"I hope the bonds will draw closer," responde
ton with a sensation very

Outside they stood a moment trying to distinguish heaven from earth.

"Glorious," said Evan, "glorious! The blackest night I have ever seen even in the Highlands. We are completely in our element." They gripped hands, and one went forward and another back.

"Bitter, very bitter," said Mr. Quinton to himself. "The iron has gone deeper than I thought. Poor Kinloch!"

CHAPTER XVI

KINLOCH swung into the pitchy night in a mood to consort with the Furies. An unutterable vengeance strained at his heart. Nothing, it seemed, less than instant wrecking of the globe and the fell satisfaction of dancing among the scattered fragments could appease his sense of wrong. For the fury of baffled strength was for the first time upon him.

Happily a present necessity helped to "abate the dint of his wrath." Outside Granvorlich gates he was in the forest, and the forest besides being blacker than Acheron was a jungle of spikes and briars. In the first five minutes mischance and a headlong rage drove him from the road into a thicket, in which he nearly left his eyes. Thence for a good half-mile he groped like the blind, back and knees crooked, hands stretched as guards in front, teeth clenched in a kind of grinding impotence. That brought him to the edge of the wood, but he was aware of the fact rather by the sudden rarefying of the atmosphere than by any lightening of the ebon night. So far as the eye could tell the world might never have emerged from primeval blackness.

He was perspiring, and halted to draw breath. However his feet might fare his face was henceforth free, and he flung up his head at once in relief and defiance, like an infuriate stag escaped from the chase. His surroundings he knew by instinct, even if he could not discern them by sight. From the valley in which Granvorlich lay, to the ridge or top he was to cross, there was a stiff ascent, reckoned at two miles as traced in the winding carriage road,

[illegible] and came out of a hole like a ducked spaniel. A very little time served to the middle. At the icy, treacherous clasp of could not help gasping a little now and then, bu a heart too hot to be cooled by any process of dr nether limbs.

In a pause over a sudden shaking of the quagr caught a kind of quivering pallor in the east. watched a gleaming shaft cleft the black vault the zenith, leaving a hazy trail of grey, and he that the world had still a horizon. In the same became aware of mysterious stirrings all about, t ings and breathings it might be, of an innumera tude awakening from deep sleep, and a thrilling sessed him. For it is a weird experience, thus ir and alone to have the hush of death broken by t restoration to life of millions of God's creatures.

In the east the pallid heavens seemed to shiver There was a vague twilight as if day and nigh suspense at the parting. Then the milky suffusi Presently hill-tops, at times singly, at times in g gan to rise dimly out of the darkness, like the resting swimmers from an inky sea. Another m they were flashing as if silver gilt. A flush of orar about the fount of light; extending, it turned to rc in scarlet edges and plumes of cloud. Then there a great triumphal arch, red as with the reflec mighty conflagation, and

The light came as a very timely aid. Though night still clung to the fold of the hill in which he stood as to a birthright, glimmering reflections from misty, golden tops served to mark the more prominent features. Taking reckonings, he found himself on the brink of a quaking, crumbling wall, at the bottom of which he could just detect the sullen gleam of the black water. Another step and he had been in over his head. With a shock of surprise he recognised the pit as one he had himself helped to dig in days long gone by. Looking down, it came back to him how eagerly he had done his little best in spreading the peats to the sun on the hill-face above, how recklessly he had strained nerve and muscle in his ambition to excel. And he did excel; so at least his elders told him. What availed all that effort now? The past was dead and done with.

Making a détour to clear the pitted morass, he took his way upward, sure of his footing now, and full of the unutterable thoughts which fate and the dawn conspiring together bring. The tide of light flowed apace, a lucent inundation. The shadows, a fugitive and dwindling race, were vanishing with ghostly celerity. The mountains still swam in grey seas of mist, and the valleys were a-shimmer with tangles of clinging gossamer; but the winds were stirring to the aid of the sun, sure token that the vapours were swiftly to go the way of the shadows.

When Evan reached the top of Granvorlich hill the golden day had fully come. Sitting upon a rock to rest a moment, he looked down upon his own fair strath, shining dewy and rosy in face of the morning. The Tay—the regal, well-beloved Tay, in which with tucked kilt he had so often fished for pearls—glanced in and out among woods and meadows and patches of brooding white mist. He could see westward to its source among the haunted glens of Breadalbane, and eastward, whither it poured, a torrent of foam, to the plains below Dunkeld. It furnished no bad example of the manner in which his countrymen were once in the habit of descending upon their enemies. And some of them would descend again.

Beyond the river, north and west, stretched a dazzling array of domes. It was hard even for a native to give each its proper name, but from out the crowd he easily singled the sovereign tops of Ben Vrackie and Ben-y-Gloe, Schiehallion and Ben Lawers, by the kingly lustre of their blaz-

ing crowns. The Atholl and Struan country, from the heights of Killiecrankie to the Cairn Gorms, glowed and glistened in an undulating flood of colours; and as far as the shires of Inverness and Argyll the eye followed the line of fire that seemed to leap from peak to peak, making great chasms of gloom between. Mountaineer as he was he had never looked on such a prospect in such a light. To one versed in history and tradition it was all a land of romance too; and the memory of many a wild tale and brave deed mingled with the heathery fragrance as balm to the beating mind.

Beneath the smoke was already rising from the scattered chimneys. He thought he could distinguish the blue spiral column above Pitweem; at any rate he could name the farmsteads one by one, and he knew as if he were present what the thrifty folks were about. All at once his eye caught a twinkle on the peat road far below.

"Coming for peats," he said to himself remembering how the peat-drivers were out with the dawn. And with that he started downhill, bounding through the heather like a ball.

CHAPTER XVII

A MILE down he came out on the peat road, to be saluted wonderingly by old friends and yoke-fellows going for their morning load. Dugald Macgregor, roused by the shrill calling of companions, rose in his cart with the startled face of one pricked in his sleep, and seeing his cousin inquired what in the world was the matter.

"Just out for a taste of the morning like yourself, Dugald," answered Evan.

Rubbing his heavy eyes Dugald cast them slowly over the miry clothes.

"You have been out before the sun and lost the road, am thinking," he remarked.

Evan laughed. "The truth is I didn't sleep too well last night," he explained. "So I came out for an early dander. The hill seems boggier than it used to be."

"I wouldn't wonder," said Dugald. "Well, if you're going back jump in," he added briskly.

"I think I'll just keep on down," returned Evan.

"Very well," said Dugald. "The uncle was saying the other day you weren't coming any more to see him. Getting grand and proud. The auntie will have breakfast ready. Wait till we come back."

"All right."

Evan waved his hand blithely and strode on.

In the course of the next half-hour he ran the gauntlet of so many curious greetings that he regretted not having kept to the heather. But he parried questions with jest and laughter, and at last, stained and dew-drenched, was among the harvest-fields and cosy smoking houses. Passing Braeside he had a glimpse of Red Sandy, with purple scolding face, stumping it fiercer than ever; and five minutes later he came upon Lauchie Duff, whom Sandy had driven from his door an hour before. Lauchie was seated by a stile, bleared, frowsy, disconsolate; his battered hat, grey with age, over one eye; his beloved fiddle lying awry across his knee. At the sound of approaching footsteps he looked up in sullen challenge, as one who had a grudge against all mankind, closing the unprotected eye to see the better with the other. Recognising Evan, he scrambled to his feet and limped into the middle of the road.

"Almichty Juroosalum, wha hae we here?" he cried. "As sure's death this is unexpeckit. Hae ye fa'n frae the clouds?"

"Only from the hills," answered Evan, taking the grimy clawhand which Lauchie ostentatiously proffered.

"Anything wrang?" inquired Mr. Duff.

"Nothing at all," replied Evan. "I thought I'd just like a whiff of the pure breath of morning."

"Faith, yer a heap fonder o' the breath o' mornin' nor me," said Lauchie, "to be oot in weet an' dirt at sic an oor when ye micht be croodlin' warm in yer bed dreamin' o' the lasses. That timmer-shankit son o' auld Nick, him o' the red neb—Lord! what a fizzlin' there'll be there some day, an' me by to gie him 'Cauld kail het again.' As I was sayin', he turned me frae his door a while syne, the steamin' gill-stoup that he is, as if I was a spavined cuddy, an' here I've been gettin' rheumatics sittin' my lane by a dyke-side tryin' to warm a drookit stane. I was wi' Dr. Forbes yisterday—ye can see the neck o' the bottle he gied me stickin' oot o' my back coat-pooch. Brandy-face, curse

his soul! thought I misdoot if he has ane, wid thrape doon my throat it was whisky. 'Smell it,' says I, 'ye lowin' Judas Ishcariot, aye doot-dootin' what's no sloknin' yer ain drooth.' 'I've a cauld in the head,' said he. 'A cauld in the head?' says I; 'man, I was for lichtin' my pipe at yer nose.' 'Mind yer ain,' says he: 'what's the colour o't?' 'Hand owre yours till I get licht to see,' says I. Man, he was for haein' at me wi' the crutch.

"Well, as I was tellin' ye, the doctor gied me a bottle, or rether I should say his assistant, that's Douglas Macnair, ye ken, auld Thump-the-poopit's son, him ye were ance in het water for wallopin'. Man, I was proud o' ye that time. Douglas is michty fine since he got a leesence for tinkerin' fowk. Well! Douglas was for chargin' me eichteen pence if ye please—he's a slip o' the old yew-tree is Douglas—but the doctor widna hear tell o't. 'No, no,' says he, 'we're no goin' to chairge a son o' the Muses,' that was his daffin way o' puttin' it, 'for a drappie dirty pheesic.' 'It'll no be lang I'll need it, doctor,' says I, 'for am gettin' to be a kind o' battered kail-runt.' 'Lauchie,' says he, 'ye'll see me in the mools yet: you rheumaticky chaps are teugh devils.' 'Weel, if ye slip awa first, doctor,' says I, 'take it frae me ye'll be happit cosy.' Ye'll no hae breakfasted yet?" he observed, suddenly returning to the present.

"No," said Evan.

"Nae mair hae I," chimed Lauchie. "We'll just be steppin' doon by thegither. Yer a great man noo," he added; "ken amaist a' there's to be kenned, they tell me. The law's a grand money-makin' business ance ye get the richt side o' the deil. I've whiles thocht I should hae been a lawyer mysel. Fiddlin's cauld work wi' crazed banes. An' it's gettin' to be a thankless job to the bargain. Ye see, fowk can do without music, but as lang's there's sin in their herts—an' that's likely to last a while yet for a' oor kirks an' colleges—they maun hae law. There ye've got the better o' me. Man, I dinna think muckle o' yer braw English fowk though."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Evan.

"Am no just clear in my mind hoo ye need be sorry," returned Lauchie. "But I'll tell ye something. The other nicht twa grinnin' gawkies wi' bits o' roond gless in their een an' the bran burstin' frae the calf o' their legs, struts into the Inver Arms in Aberfourie, an' cocks their bit

glesses on me an' the fiddle. 'Old man,' says ane o' them wi' a wink at the other, 'can you play the violeen?' 'I can try,' says I. 'Great Gawd,' says he; 'then perhaps you will favour the company.' Man, his way o' speakin' was grand. 'Perhaps you will favour the company with a selection from "Pinafore." Have you heard of "Pinafore"?' 'Lang or ye were born I heard o' peeney,' says I. 'My hurdies get het yet at the thocht o' a' they suffered for mine. An' I have likewise heard,' says I, 'o' a thing they ca' a bib; it's for tuckin' under the chin an' keepin' the slavers oot o' the breist. It'll no be ane o' them ye want?' There was a roar, an' I thocht he'd hae fair chokit in the froth o' his beer. Is it no injurious to the intelleck to be among sic craters?"

Just then they rounded the bend of a little hill, coming upon a cluster of trees in the midst of which stood Mr. Proudfoot's cottage.

"Here's Burnside," cried Lauchie cheerily. "Let's go in an' see the dominie."

"No; we'd better not," returned Evan. "He won't be up yet."

"We'll soon get him up," said Lauchie, "an' he'll be richt glad to see ye. He's got a rare opeenion o' ye."

As he spoke a widow was thrown up, a nightcapped head popped out, and for a moment two wondering eyes scrutinised the pair. Then there was a volley of questions, and without waiting for an answer, a loud calling on Evan to come in.

"What did I tell ye?" asked Lauchie, smacking his lips. "The dominie would be ill pleased if ye gave him the go by an' him so fond o' ye."

When the door was opened Mr. Duff passed in with the air of a time-honoured guest.

"I found him," he explained, pointing the bow at Evan, "like a mitherless peewit abune there, an' he wid hae thrapit wi' me there was nae welcome here for him."

"Lauchie, I'd start the day on the truth if I were you," answered Mr. Proudfoot.

"That's aye the dominie," cried Lauchie. "Ye open yer mooth an' he bites yer head aff. He's ca'ed me leer oftener nor there's a hair in his beard. By the holy King Herod, if I thocht he ment it——"

"Get from among my feet, Lauchie," said the dominie.

He led the way into the little kitchen, which was also dining and sitting room, stirred the heap of ash piled up to keep the fire alive, and put on an armful of peats. That done, he linked a kettle upon a chain slung somewhere in the darkness of the chimney, and thrust the bellows into Lauchie's hand.

"Blow," he said. "The mother will be down in a minute."

Then turning he took Evan by the arm.

"Will you come up till I finish dressing?" he asked, and they went out together.

On entering the bedroom Mr. Proudfoot shut the door very deliberately and set his back against it. Standing thus he bent a concentrated look on his pupil's face.

"What is it?" he asked quietly, maintaining the sheer gaze.

Evan laughed a trifle uneasily.

"A smart slap in the face; no more," he answered.

"A woman?" said the dominie with the quick intuition of one who has suffered.

"A woman's father," replied Evan.

The master's face blenched; he came near groaning aloud.

"Tell me about it," he said. "We are old friends. You can trust me." And nothing loth to have such a confidant, Evan frankly told all, the dominie listening with strained, unwinking eyes.

"God save us!" he ejaculated when the tale was done. "I had rather a hundred other evils had befallen you than this one."

"I am not going to take the Roman road out of the world just yet, sir," responded Evan.

"O my Evan, my Evan!" cried the dominie, "though it was never in our lesson books, it's the staying and not the going that's the problem—the steering when the cockle-boat is among the breakers. What's your course now?"

"Straight back to London," replied Evan. "That tumultuous desert will hide me."

Something of rebuke instantly mingled with the concern in the dominie's countenance.

"That note is false," he said. "It has not the true twang of the iron string. Why should you seek to hide in tumultuous deserts?"

"To get the bay salt from under my eyelids," replied Evan grimly.

"For God's sake," cried the dominie, the note of concern again dominant, "smother reckless or rebellious thoughts. Destiny abides no waywardness, and her searing irons scorch for life—for life? ay, for eternity."

"I have vowed to make them smart for it," returned Evan passionately.

The dominie made the circuit of the room.

"You will undo that oath," he pleaded, facing Evan again. "It's tragic sport kicking against the pricks. Yes, you must undo it. Samson was revenged on the Philistines at the cost of his own life. So it was then; so it will be always. By all you hold dear, trample on the serpent head of revenge."

"It's dutiful to kiss the rod," answered Evan, with rising heat. "But have you ever kissed such a rod as this, sir?"

"We will talk of that another time," rejoined the dominie. "But you must undo that oath."

CHAPTER XVIII

In the kitchen Lauchie still officiously plied the bellows, though the flame about the porridge-pot licked the fingers of Mrs. Proudfoot as the meal sifted through them. Twice she asked him to desist, but he had got his instructions from one who was not to be disobeyed.

"The dominie would hae me oot neck and crap if I didna blaw," said Lauchie; and blew on, less, it is to be suspected, to exemplify the virtue of obedience than to hasten comfort for a craving stomach.

As the latch clicked Mrs. Proudfoot turned, her furrowed face beaming with welcome, and ran to meet Evan, furtively wiping her hands on her apron. "Ah! hinny, there you are," she cried, and would have embraced him, but for fear of covering him with meal. As it was she merely took his two hands in her own and pressed them hard, looking wistfully in his face. Then setting him a chair, as if he were a prince, she inquired about his health and bewailed his miry legs in the same breath, apologised

"I thought I put on the kettle, Mrs. P.," ob dominie, with a look at the bubbling pot.

"So you did, dearie, so you did," owned h "But I just set it down a wee thinking maybe M would as soon begin wi' the drappie porridge way. The cup of tea will come after."

"I am glad you have done that, Mrs. Proud marked Evan.

"There, now," cried the old lady, straightening and beaming in pleasure. "I'm a great believ porridge. What is it Burns says? 'The halesome chief of Scotia's food.' Robbie must have liked

"They wrang him sair or there were things liked a heap better nor porridge," put in Lauch knowing wag of the head.

"I'll tell you a thing he hated like poison," dominie.

"What was that?" asked Lauchie.

"Bletherers," replied the dominie.

"Ay, but he was fond o' fiddlers," was the u response. "He up wi' his gless to Neil Gow's he Man, I'd like fine till have kent him. Kindred as the sayin' is; ay, faith, speerits an' kindred in n nor ane. When I was younger than I am noo—I awa wi' the best o' us, mem," grinning upon Mr foot; "that same was ane o' the sorrows o' David When I was a wheen years younger an' fit for

"And that's a great deal," growled the dominie.

"Ye've a son that tells the truth onyway, mem," said Lauchie sweetly.

The meal had the relish of good-will. To Evan Mrs. Proudfoot ministered with more than the love of a mother, pressing him to eat and make himself at home, and between whiles asking questions about "the michty city which is greater than Babylon or Rome, I'm told, and has mair fowk in it than all puir auld Scotland." She particularly wished to know if ministers, policemen, and judges were kept very busy, and whether the "jyles" were "ay fu"; and on being furnished with criminal statistics sighed plaintively that "this is a fell wicked world," a judgment which Lauchie promptly confirmed. In spite of the morning walk and keen air Evan had to nurse his appetite; but Mr. Duff's performance suggested the filling of a bottomless well.

"There's bannocks in Strathbogie yet," he remarked blithely, turning from porridge to scones. "Yer as good at the bakin' as ever, mem. No a lass in the countryside comes near ye." His tongue was loosed too, if so much may be said of a member which no man had ever known to be bound. Genial with good cheer, he took the host's rebukes and sarcasms as a matter for boundless merriment. But he carefully treasured the memory of them against another time, for Lauchie cherished the doctrine of revenge.

The dominie was moody and self-absorbed. He ate little, sat with a dark brow and a compressed mouth, silent save when he exploded like a flash upon the babbling Lauchie. His mother glanced at him nervously. She knew there was trouble. What it was she could not guess, and durst not ask, but his face left no doubt of its existence. He seemed lost in a kind of fiery reverie. Suddenly, while others talked, his eyes would fasten in an intense gaze upon Evan, then as suddenly drop and wander, to be lifted again full of pain and pity. A legion of thoughts trooped upon him from the past, and as he wrestled with them there rose before him that horrible blackness, that unspeakable Inferno, which still had power to make the strong man shudder to his marrow. Great God! and the scholar he had watched and guided, and led by the hand, and been proud of beyond all other scholars or men, had stumbled blindly upon the very brink of that awful abyss in which

after us; with us, not a step." And Lauchie
fortable for the moment obligingly trudged beh
he entertained himself by keeping up a fusillade
at long range.

The untimely appearance of the visitors s
agog. Hastening to the front as general in
Lauchie explained to an assembly which include
Lisspeth how he, happening to be abroad at skr
because of the man whose charity burned in hi
need name no names—found their "muckle respe
friend" wandering like "a mitherless peewit" on
and forthwith took him to the dominie's as t
haven of refuge and port of supply. Twice h
this with picturesque variations such as an artis
introduce, and was beginning again when th
turned on him. It was the pounce of the angry l
meddling cur; yet Lauchie was not visibly put ou

"The dominie got oot o' bed owre early this
and on the wrang side," he sniggered, discreet
away. "He'll get the better o't, though. We
again or ye gang sooth," he nodded affably to
hirpled off.

The master immediately took Mr. Macgregor t
and led him to the barn.

"There's to be no clyping," he said almost fier
itching, open-mouthed Neil. "Your nephew's ha
fortune or the folly to fall in love and [illegible]

"He was born with wings," returned the dominie, "but carrying him too near the sun they're singed for the present. The affair stands thus: two young people set sail for heaven and landed in the other place. You understand what that means?"

"I think so," answered Neil dubiously.

"You're lucky to be in any doubt on such a matter," said the dominie. "Well! there's been an encounter between Mr. Dudley and Evan, both sides politely pouring in hot shot, as I understand, and now there's a state of war."

"Gosh pless my heart and soul and all that iss apout me," ejaculated Neil. "But Evan will haf her yet," he added quickly. "Oh ay, Evan will haf her. That laddie will get things as if the world wass just made for himself."

"You great big bairn," retorted the dominie savagely, "how's he going to have her? Do you know what it is to fight gold? Have you ever taken money by the throat and tried to throw it? By God, if you put fighting in the laddie's head, as sure's you're a kirk elder I'll kill you for all your sanctity. Now remember what I tell you—tight lips, and none of your damned nods and winks. There'll be enough to talk without you. Deaf, blind, dumb, blankly ignorant, and crassly stupid, that's your cue. Part of it at least will come naturally. When inquisitive folk ask questions, send them to me and I'll give them stories to tell."

By the time this barn conference came to an end David had joined the group outside, and after some general conversation, in which Mr. Proudfoot was brusquely oracular, father and son went off together.

"I'll look in to see you in the evening," the dominie called after them; and he too went his way.

Thereupon Lisspeth quietly took Neil aside and picked him of his secret. She was full of wonder and exclamations.

"Ay," said Neil, perspiring at the thought of the next meeting with the dominie, "Evan will be daft with the lasses like David and Solomon and other wise men that will make fools of themselves. Am sure I do not know what for God will make petticoats at all."

"It will pe very extrornar," said Lisspeth exasperatingly.

David was sorely perplexed by his son's return, but instead of trying to account for it, or meddling with matters which, as he owned to himself, he probably could

not understand, he was content to wait for enlightenment. It came through Jessie, who would not be denied her brother's confidence. The little idolatress was exceeding wroth with Mr. Dudley, hoped his money would do him good, that this was not the sort of pride that went before a fall, and, with flashing eye and heightened colour, predicted he would be sorry yet. She was not a little wroth also with the rejected because he did not even join in the condemnation.

"You don't deserve a sweetheart," she told him, "and if I wasn't your sister and can't help it I wouldn't have anything to do with you. I think Mr. Dudley was right after all. You'll never get a wife, sir, at this rate." The next minute she was begging him to keep up his heart, since there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

"Yes," said Evan, "one has only to cast one's net and they'll be landed in shoals."

Faithful to his promise, the dominie called for Evan a little after dusk, and the two went out alone by the edge of the sombre woods. The glitter of warm autumn stars was in the sky, the balms of autumn—odours of hazel and ripe corn, of apple and bramble and bracken—were on the still air, and the far-off music of many waters made an enchanted hush. For a while the pair paced step for step without speech. Half-an-hour the silent communion lasted; then, all at once, in the bight of a straggling fir plantation, where none could spy upon them, the dominie drew up fronting his companion. The starlight fell on his grizzled face, softening its rugged outline, and his eyes were mistily bright. It flashed upon Evan that there were signs of age in the grey figure, and his heart melted. The fierce energy characteristic of the dominie seemed to have died as if the fires of life were waning. It was hard to imagine him yielding a jot to time, yet the conquering hand was surely heavy upon this subdued and shrunken form.

"And he cannot have a penny saved for his winter evening," was Evan's reflection. "What will become of him?"

"I have been thinking all day of what has happened," said Mr. Proudfoot, breaking in upon these thoughts, "and laddie, laddie! it has made my heart sore. I am not going to preach or to blame. God knows it would ill become me. A battered old hulk, bilged and gone to pieces, that's what the preacher would be, one who has missed every chance

in life and has just one solace left—that he taught you. A thousand times I have told myself that in going down to the grave that would be my one satisfaction. I wonder," he added in a shaky voice, "I wonder if you realise what you were and are to your poor old dominie?"

"One thing, sir, I do realise," responded Evan, touched in his tenderest place, "that I owe him what I can never repay, that he was ever my best friend and counsellor."

"He tried," said the dominie, "he tried. But he's a poor counsellor who cannot guide his own steps. And yet only those who have passed through the furnace know its sweat of agony. In this matter you'll not put me down as an empty talker. I know all too well what may become of a man because of a woman—all too well. You have heard stories—I tell you, before God, they are a pack of lies. The woman who sent me to the devil and Burnside was an angel, in spite of evil tongues. And once before I die I will see her grave if I tramp to it barefoot. I thought to go down to darkness with my lips eternally sealed on that subject. Do you think I'd speak after forty years of silence if I didn't love you as my own soul? We speak best of what we know; and, my dear Evan, I cannot see you to-day standing where I once stood and hold my tongue. You and I have learned our bits of Greek and Latin together; there are things in this life beside which Greek and Latin are nameless trifles—children's gauds and rattles. The rebel angels were very learned and very clever, and they got perdition for their reward. I made one false step, and the rest was ruin. You will be wiser?

"There is a certain gulf," he went on huskily, after a forced pause, "in which the worthless float as scum and the strong go down headlong. Bear with me if I warn you of it. You remember what I wrote at our first parting: 'To thine own self be true'—the words of our master of humanity. It is all I ask."

The moon, newly risen, lighted the master's face, and it was wet.

"You will be true to yourself," he repeated. "Give me your hand on that." And without a word Evan gave a burning right hand.

END OF BOOK III.

BOOK IV.

THE BOOK OF JUDGMENT

O sun,
Born the great sphere thou movest in! darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world.

Antony and Cleopatra.

The Wisdom, infinitely wise,
That gives to human destinies
  Their foreordained necessity,
Has made no law more fixed below
Than the alternate ebb and flow
  Of fortune and Adversity.

CHAPTER I

On returning to London Evan's first enterprise was to master the art, the hardest he had ever attempted, of gracefully kicking his heels among idle or half-employed juniors while waiting the nod of patronage. Though against the grain and the reverse of lucrative, the exercise was occasionally amusing. For in spite of a dire want of pence, the brilliant Unbriefed made a jovial band, twitting Fate by devouring huge quantities of imaginary pudding and gaily appointing themselves to great offices without tedious formality or essential training. Despising creed, they yet held firmly to one cardinal article of faith, to wit, a scathing contempt for all seniors, from the illustrious beadle on the Woolsack to the latest pretender who took silk. An outsider admitted to their confidence would have marvelled how, in an enlightened age and country, it came to pass that all desirable posts were held by snuffy grandmothers, most with brazen faces and a pitiable ignorance of law, who,

nevertheless, received from two to ten thousand pounds sterling a year for growling unintelligibly about what they did not understand. There was but one solution of the mystery: that the dispensers of patronage were fools.

"Wait!" a choice spirit once cried in the midst of a wild discussion on the "rotten" condition of the English Bar. "By the holy Moses, wait till I ogle the Lords from the seat of the red fleece, and you'll see reforms."

"Why the doose," demanded another, somewhat irrelevantly, "must a barrister stick like a wallflower till some piddling solicitor stumbles on him, you know? Why can't he kick away the bushel and reveal his light like any other sane man of business? You reply, Tradition and the dignity of the profession! I say, Demn tradition and the dignity of the profession, when they threaten to starve us. What we want are nice fat litigants who will stand plenty of bleeding, and none of your fine screwed-up snouts. We want also nepotism and the superstition of great names abolished; and, above all—let the winds waft it—above all, liberty to blow our own horns."

"When you are blowing yours I hope I shall not be by," commented a cynic.

It was a sore trial to many a Cicero and Pitt of University Unions to sit dumb in court while babes pleaded and sleepy old wives bobbed their heads and mumbled nonsense. There was but one solace—the sweet privilege of criticism, and it was not neglected.

Evan's association with these suppressed lights did not come about by choice. Some of them had been his contemporaries at Oxford and tacitly resumed old comradeship; the accidents and necessities of the profession did the rest. Most of them were content to criticise and dawdle, varying the task by discussing social triumphs and rebukes, the respective merits and charms of actors and actresses, the best methods of dealing with importunate tailors and hatters, and the chances of surprising Fortune by capturing heiresses. It was not the least hardship of their lot that theory was always on their side, and fact ever against them.

A few pushed beyond conventional lines, and of these Evan was one. He was edging into a practice. Mr. Quinton remembered him, marked with gratitude his invincible ardour and patience in "devilling," his lucidity and

grasp of detail, and for the rest, gave him the right hand of encouragement. But solicitors, with their heart-breaking bias for established reputations, were chary of unproved talent, and the needful gold trickled as it were in drops. Add that two pots had to be kept boiling. Almost the last thing Evan did before leaving home was to extort a promise from his father (got by sheer force of pressure) to cease from the task of earning bread, and Jessie was forbidden to set foot in field save by way of pleasure. So that, whatever came or went, the monthly remittance must not fail. He would strip for the fight, nay, if the worst came to the worst, he would tighten his waist-belt at dinner-time—he knew how to do it—but happen what might there should be no disappointment in the cottage at Pitweem.

Looking round for supplementary ways and means, he lighted inevitably upon the stay of the waiting barrister, England's Palladium—the Press. The Oxford reputation, which as yet meant nothing at the Bar, served him a little here. His record passed from mouth to mouth, and editors who could teach Hebrews to haggle boasted of having a double-first on their staff. Mr. Quinton and the Master of Balliol hastened to throw in their influence; yet he made copious contributions to the waste-paper basket, and "paper bullets" of his own making were pitilessly fired at him by the postman. The return of the rejected, which generally makes the heart sick and the head heavy, he took in spirit as Byron in the flesh took the Thane of Edina's chastisement—with a bottle of port. The faster the dishonoured manuscripts rained upon him, the harder he set his teeth.

"I'll do it," he said to himself, grimly. "I'll do it." And he did. Essays, reviews, leading articles, satires on the models of Swift and Heine, heresies *à la Renan*, fanciful character-sketches, descriptive pieces, papers on abstruse points of law and scholarship flowed from his racing pen. And he owed his rejections chiefly to the ignorance that sent these things to quarters where Heaven had not provided wit to understand them. For not every great journal in the land deigns to be on terms of familiarity with the spirits of classic satirists and heretics.

Early in his career he made acquaintance with Fleet Street at the haggard two o'clock in the morning, struck fellowship with genius down at heel and sodden of heart,

and was jubilantly slapped on the back by the beery borrowing journalist, the valiant schemer who conquers an empire in imagination and lacks will-power enough to get himself a new coat. The ways of practical journalism were startling at first; but very soon the blasphemies of a newspaper office rang trite. Almost insensibly too came acceptance of the able editor's creed that the business of the Heaven-born journalist is with interest, not with principle; that it is his high function to put Truth in blinkers, lest, seeing too much, she bolt and disturb the peace of respectable people. In his humorous moods Evan sometimes entertained himself with visions of sagacious England at breakfast, swallowing, with equal felicity, buttered muffins and sugared political doctrine deftly done up to suit her various taste, and he wondered what would be the end.

Further, he did what all students of the world and humanity long to do sooner or later—he wrote a novel, wrote it with his heart's blood (as he felt) in the grey hours when he should have slept; and carried it to an eminent publisher. The eminent publisher received him civilly, sighed on learning his business, yet urbanely promised to "consider" the story. The aspirant's heart beat high as there flashed upon him a vision of his own name blazoned on a title-page. A second vision showed intoxicating reviews and many editions. It was something to have written a book.

"When may I call for an answer?" he ventured to ask. "In a week?"

The publisher put the points of his fingers together and looked grave.

"Let me see," he responded. "My 'readers' are simply overwhelmed with manuscripts just now. You authors are so industrious, so extraordinarily industrious. A week? dear me, no; say a month or six weeks—or stay: I will give instructions to strain a point—say three weeks, three weeks from to-day—between three and half-past four in the afternoon."

And as if it were not enough to break the spell by declining to accept offhand, he proceeded to administer a dose of the wet blanket.

"I am sorry to tell you," he remarked, pressing his fingers harder together and looking yet graver, "that the demand for novels, especially by beginners, was never

so bad as it is to-day. I cannot make out, I am sure, what things are coming to. People are ceasing to read fiction."

The novice's cue was to regret this unhappy state of affairs, but instead he fatuously observed that fiction seemed to be pretty well represented in publishers' lists; and, as if that were not madness enough, suggested that every novelist, even the most brilliant and popular, must at some time have made a start. Ah! possibly. The patron of genius rolled his eyes as if to indicate how charming he found innocence in a sophisticated world, rose smiling, and so accomplished the process of bowing out. His visitor somehow felt it a chilly entrance upon the glorious field of literature.

Punctually at the end of three weeks the neophyte returned, to receive his manuscript and a note declining the honour of publishing it, from the hands of a haughty youth with a high manner and a pimply face, whose office it was to dispose of the unlucky amateur. Thereafter the masterpiece went up and down "The Row" to be kicked in rotation by the conscript fathers. When, by reason of dirt and tatters, it became unfit to wander in decency it went headlong into a trunk and was presently forgotten. But time, which had ever a trick of malice, one day brought it forth again. Many things had come and gone in the interval; but the eminent publisher still sat in his room patiently awaiting a chance to encourage genius, and noticing that fame was beginning to concern herself with a certain name, he expressed an ardent desire to publish "something" by Mr. Kinloch. So the novel, after passing through the hands of a clerkly copyist, was sent to him. He was charmed with it, thought it could not miss making a hit, and was profusely glad to be the means of giving such a work to the world. The response made the good man lay the sin of cursing on his soul.

"Your opinion of my story is curious," wrote the author, "since, as you may remember, you once declined the book as worthless. As not a line has been added or altered, and it can scarcely have improved by mere process of time, your flatteries are puzzling. I am inclined to think your first opinion must have been right; and on reconsideration nothing would induce me to publish." And this Johnsonian thrust delivered, the novel went back among dusty papers, to be rewritten should Heaven ever grant sufficient leisure.

For the present, however, there was no demand for novels written in the heart's blood of a novice, and journalistically it was sore grinding in the Philistine's mill. Yet predious as were pence, it was more by way of experiment than for the magnificent guinea a week that he accepted the post of second sub-editor on *The Harbinger*, a weekly paper "of politics, fashion, science, art, and literature." In this exalted position he came into close touch with the free lances of the profession. No later than the evening on which he took office he had the honour to receive a visit from one of these prodigious lights, a gentleman with a red eye, a shuffling gait, the raven throat of chronic alcoholism, manifold odours, mostly stale, and apparel that was tragically eloquent of better days. Though the man entered smiling broadly, he had for greeting a grunt and a sour glance from the first sub-editor, who knew him, and a blank stare from the second, to whom he was a stranger. Nothing daunted, he passed a genial imprecation on people who hid themselves up three flights of abominable stairs, and, removing his rusty, napless silk from his head, laid it on a pile of papers fresh from the sub-editorial hand.

"I wish to God you'd mind where you lay your hat, Bertram," growled the senior sub-editor, flinging it at him.

"That's not calculated to improve the condition of my top piece," observed Mr. Bertram, lifting the defiled hat from the floor. "My dear Smith, you need a tonic. Let me suggest that you take a holiday and go to see what 'the wild waves are saying, sister, the whole day long.' And that reminds me, sir, that this right hand had once the happiness to grasp the right hand of Charles Dickens. A tight dapper little buck was Charlie. Ah! that was many years ago, when life went a-maying with nature, hope, and poetry and etceteras that need not now be mentioned. You will find the sentiment in Coleridge, who abounds in these pretty trifles. It was just after I left Cambridge in a raging mathematical fever—fancy, my dear sir, a raging mathematical fever. The truth is I was far gone in astronomy—a noble but perplexing science. The heavens, if I may so express myself, must always be of more or less interest to the earth. Where, may I ask, do our ultimate hopes lie? Among the stars, those 'patines of bright gold,' as the sublime William has it. 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' ah me! sweet memories of childhood. The perfumed

winds are on my cheek; I seem to smell the honeysuckle and the rose. Forgive me, gentlemen, for being poetic in the presence of sub-editors. The point is that I wept a whole night through at the thought of young Dombey shuffling off this mortal coil. Dickens knew how to tap the cistern; by Jove, sir, in drawing water he could knock Aaron's rod into a cocked hat. He's the best patent squeeze-the-sponge ever invented. Not many tears left, sir, when he's done with you. He just turns the spigot, and there you are—flowing, helplessly flowing."

"You wept?" said Smith contemptuously.

"I am not ashamed to own it," answered Mr. Bertram. "My eyes were wells, springs, fountains, streams, rivulets, what you like, and my nose, sir, was not unlike a spout. I was greatly refreshed, too, as you would be, Smith, if you were to take a week's airing among the girls on Brighton beach—prettiest girl I ever saw was on Brighton beach—golden hair, dark eyelashes, blue eyes, pouting mouth, nods, winks, blushes—ravishing! If you go I'll take your place with pleasure."

"Dare say," muttered Smith, without lifting his head.

"I have not learned your friend's name yet," said Mr. Bertram, bowing to Evan.

"And why the blazes should you learn it?" demanded Smith. "But it's Kinloch. Fire ahead."

"You have sometimes an abominably offensive way with you, Smith," retorted Mr. Bertram. "Come to leave your footprints on the everlasting flint?" he inquired, turning back to Evan. "Well, there's no God in Fleet Street, and d—— little style. Jot that down on the tablets of your memory; it'll save you from wasting your affection on idols."

"Dry up!" broke in the senior sub-editor, who was viciously scoring an archbishop's speech.

"Smith, you're insulting," said Mr. Bertram drawing himself up with dignity. "Look you, sir," he went on to Evan. "You're a sub. God forbid I should malign you. And yet when I bring in a par—a finely written thing, sir, poetic sentiment, satire, humour, style and all that, the idiot with the blue pencil knocks all the sense out of it. What do you say to that?"

"That it's time for you to go," put in the senior sub-editor.

"Look here, old man," responded Mr. Bertram beseechingly. "I have brought you just a trifle. Do look over it, and pass it on to the chief. I'm as hard up as a curate with a dozen of a family; if you'll excuse the word, bust—that's about the size of it."

He took out a threepenny bit, and twirled it on the table.

"The whole bank account," he said apologetically. "If three gentlemen can get a brandy and soda each out of that, pubs are places of dreams. May I presume so far as to be indebted to you?" bending towards Evan.

His eyes gleamed ravenously like a beast's as he picked up a two-shilling piece.

"Come," he cried. "I know just the place to go to." And as the invitation was declined, "Well, I must be toddling. If your blue pencil smashes me up," he added, nodding to the second sub-editor, "I'll cut your liver out. Ta, ta." The next minute he was clattering down the stairs with a hoarse note of song.

"A sample of our visitors," remarked the first sub-editor. "You'll get used to them."

CHAPTER II

ONE busy evening at *The Harbinger* office Smith tossed a bundle of papers, consisting chiefly of delicately perfumed notes, across the table to his colleague.

"Some more society rot," he said in the tone of chronic irritation peculiar to the sub-editor who has long struggled with the vanity and verbosity of his race. "Lick it into shape, will you? and don't be afraid to knock the stuffing out of it. We haven't room for a tenth part of that gas."

Evan set to with great heartiness to knock the "stuffing" out, working havoc with many an eager hope of self-advertisement in the process. He was proceeding at his merriest pace when, all at once, he paused with a sound that was half gasp, half groan of pain. Smith, bristles all on end, looked up quickly, and the vicious blue pencil dropped from his startled hand.

Never," said Evan, breathing a
in the throes of the disease. "Sit d
bringing up his reserve of will. "I'
"You're all wrong," returned Smi
ash—that's what your face is. You
at once. I'm d——d, you know, if
chief witness at an inquest. Come, t
He seized Evan's arm, and the tw
"A stiff brandy will set you O.K
as they stumbled down the steep il
a nasty seizure, whatever it is."
"It was unexpected rather," respor
must be exaggerating."
He smiled under a flickering gas j
livid a hue that his companion lost
"If you saw yourself now you woul
Smith, with the bluntness of grippin
soul I never saw a man look so ba
was when he heard he had lost ever
Exchange."
"Everything?" repeated Evan, gr
idea. "How funny! The fool should
Lost everything—there are so many
Smith." And while his tongue wag
brain burned with the thought of a ca
any on the Stock Exchange.
Returning braced by the fiery dra
wived will he



A dozen times he read this, face bent close above the paper, now thrilling with an exquisite anguish, now wondering lightheadedly what it all meant.

"You are not bad again?" asked the kindly Smith, scrutinising the bowed form on the other side of the table.

"Much better, thank you," answered Evan.

"Not dizzy?" persisted Smith. "You look mighty dazed, you know—just as if you had been dealt a stunning blow. Don't you think you'd better go home?"

The mere suggestion of yielding stung like a dagger.

"Go home," repeated Evan in tones of resentment. "Certainly not. Do you think I'm a schoolgirl taken with the colic? Why don't you propose soothing syrup? Be good enough to take off that long face, Smith. One would imagine you had been doing a round of funerals, and had caught the dolours from the paid mutes. You'll have the green sickness if you don't look out. Think of wedding bells, man, and never mind worms, and graves, and epitaphs. What say you to a nice little supper all by ourselves?"

Smith, though utterly unable to account for the miraculous change, could find no possible objection to the nice little supper, the more especially as he had dined but indifferently that evening. So having got a complete impression of *The Harbinger* off the machine, they went joyously forth to enrich the coffers of a Strand club.

"Smith," said Evan in the warm after-glow of supper, as the two poured smoke in each other's faces, "I'm going to tell you a secret."

Smith inclined his ear confidentially, expecting explanation of the mystery which puzzled him.

"The post of second sub-editor on *The Harbinger* is vacant."

Smith stared a moment in stark incredulity.

"Good Lord!" he cried then, with an uneasy feeling that his friend was smitten with insanity. "What the devil do you mean? Why do you throw it up?"

"Chiefly to please myself," replied Evan whimsically, "but partly also out of sheer honesty. You may well open your eyes at such words from a lawyer and journalist. But the fact is I'm underworked and overpaid. The generosity of newspaper proprietors troubles me. One-and-twenty shillings, Smith, for a few hours once a week and the near

uel's example and take a walk do
it's the most wonderful street in t
are sacred to truth and genius. Tl
and the flowing bowl. My good S
stitute and successor in the great o
say you'll find candidates thicker
the brooks of Vallombrosa. Let
guinea and his predecessor's bles
our revered proprietor for this u
severing our connection. I'll reme
in the exercise of your discretion le
the rescue. If any of my belongin
another score to the debt I have alr
ing them to me."

"Are you not going to look back
more alarmed than ever for his frie

"As I'm a living, rational man, n
would induce me to enter that fan
Harbinger is too much for me; I di
The blue pencil is for stronger han

Smith made a feint of laughing, b
ment at his heart. Kinloch, of all n
talking and acting in this fashion—
for it but Bedlam.

When they left the banqueting-ha
Street had fallen into the lull whic
nous City for a little



"There was a time, Smith," observed Kinloch, as a guardian of the peace hove round a corner, "when the usages of polite society would have justified us in knocking that man's helmet clean over that man's nose. *Autres temps, autres mœurs*, my festive cock. The age of chivalry is gone. Still, if you're on for a frolic——"

Smith shook his head violently; *he* had not resigned.

"Most grave and reverend sub, we'll to bed then," said Evan, "and dream of what we daren't do. It were something to clutch the world and crush it in one's fist like a rotten nut. Yet you were undoubtedly right in shaking that wise head, my good Socrates: Heaven preserve it to grow hoary with wisdom. Smith, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered. Here we are at 'roaring Temple Bar,' and the faithless Griffin's asleep. Good-night, good Smith —Good-bye."

He shook hands with a laugh, and disappeared through an archway into that incongruous old world, the Temple. Had the dominie been present he might have shuddered for his idol.

CHAPTER III

EENTERING the chill vacancy of his room he dropped into a chair, hat and overcoat on, sitting heavily forward with a hot face buried in hotter hands. He scarce knew how he felt. Heaven and earth were desolate. Something had struck a shattering blow; something had cracked and burst asunder, leaving a horrid void. That was all.

By-and-by he tried to account to himself for this ruthless spilling of his cup of happiness, of hope. Had Florence proved false? As well ask if the sun were ice. He would lay his soul on the loyalty of that intrepid heart. A father gluttonous of gold—he it was that wrought the ruin. Well! since he lusted for gold let him have gold, ay, and let every yellow piece breed curses that would blister and canker till the flinty breast was eaten.

He leaped up and began to pace to and fro, shaking a clenched fist at insensible walls. To think that Langham, the notorious nincompoop Langham, was after all to have

—pagn! he had none. If he had, impotently gnashing his teeth up five pairs of c stairs while a gilded imbecile quietly carried He took a turn, and laughed again. Healtl Langham! long might he flourish like a gre He had won. He deserved to be sought o gratulated. Glory be to Langham! As surel watches over the affairs of men the grim schoo drilling an obstreperous scholar to a sense of He, a Jack-in-the-box barrister, with scarce to his name, to be lifting his eyes to the d Leonard Dudley, financier and M.P.! The cackled sardonically at the presumption. Lan the man, Langham of the pots of gold, Langha of his father, a millionaire. Well, so be it. Hor maidens who live for ever. Since heaven and created in jest, what mattered it how the puppe

Divesting himself of hat and overcoat he sat d determined to drive away the black besieging and that dire paragraph took shape before his in letters a thousandfold magnified. Rising in quaking horror, he began once more to pace the f

"Mr. Kinloch," he said to himself aloud, "so sitting on your nerves; look out!"

Better go to bed; bed was the place in which all mortal ills. But when he went sleep did nc him; so he tossed, generating a fever

caps under those hideous coverings, and would presently rise to munch, and go forth to plunder every man his neighbour in order to munch the more. Ach! it was enough to give one the disgust of Gulliver with his kind.

St. Paul's alone had some degree of congruity. It reared its colossal head with a sort of regal composure, a magnificent indifference. That was Wren's noble handiwork, the great Wren, a man of genius, people said. Had Christopher ever sharpened his relish of life by eating aloes steeped in gall? Daily under that superb dome people congregated to hear the man of rubrics and litanies reciting in a sing-song voice old wives' fables about the Gospel of love and the root of all evil. And the more he secured of that same root which he denounced with so much unction the mellower he found his soul. So the world wagged; and Honesty was a fool, and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman.

Perhaps it was the thought of band and surplice and droning organ that proved soothing. At any rate, he dozed presently, slumbering uneasily till roused by a knocking at his door. There were letters for him. The first on which his eye fell bore the familiar hand of Jessie, and came with the freshness of wild winds and running waters, the fragrance of heather and broom. Jessie's chronicle might have sufficed for a broadsheet. Never a marriage, a death, or a christening within the bounds of her horizon but was faithfully recorded; and equal justice was done to the weather, the crops, the state of religion, the bill of health, and whatever else might be supposed to interest her correspondent. Her special piece of news was of a certain deacon well known to Evan who, unduly prolonging the Saturday night bout, appeared in kirk one Sunday with marks of the debauch plain upon him. The scandal inspired Mr. Macnair to preach a dreadful sermon about hypocrites and wine-bibbers, and the place prepared for them.

"You should have heard him," concluded Jessie.

"Thank you, sweet sister, but I know enough of fiery torments," was the comment.

The letter also acknowledged the monthly gift, dwelling, in language that made the reader's head sing, on the love that remembered them so unfailingly.

"God bless my dear brother," wrote Jessie. "Last night after our father prayed for you (he does not go to bed

A second letter was from th
Dispatch, asking for something ce
"something topical, if possible," it
gave a bound. The editor sho
tremely topical. So an Aristopha
"The Blessings of Disappointmen
wrote the startled editor, "but I e
pietists. Where did you get your
emn paradoxes, and above all, w
style?"

"They're all among the blessings
marked Evan to himself.

The editor was not disappointed.
that article with the swoop of an eag
if Voltaire had come back to shatt
editor, borne aloft on the wave of
gently requested more. But the s
the lees of his bitterness.

CHAPTER I'

UPON one thing the cast-out lover
on the fateful afternoon to keep f
wedding bells. The result:

He arrived just in time to hear the dying strains of the Bridal Chorus from "Lohengrin"; but though too late to see the wedding party pass in, he had but to keep his ears open to receive a vivid impression of its appearance. The bride was naturally the focus of attention.

"Poor thing, she did look dre'ful trembly and no mistake," observed a gigantic dame close beside him. "You'll get over that, pretty missy, says I. The time will come, says I, when you won't be trembly."

The masterful dame gurgled with the heavings of an earthquake.

"You wasn't trembly getting spliced, was you, Missus Colter?" chuckled a little witch with a wizened face. "A mind it was Colter as had the tremors that day."

"He were sober ennyway, Missus Pike," retorted Mrs. Colter without an atom of resentment. "You mind 'ow my man had to give Pike an arm. They said as 'ow you had him drugged to come to the scratch." And again the leviathan shook and laughed huskily. "But Lor! wot's the hodds? Man were made for woman, my dear, made fust too to see he were made proper, though there's a screw loose in the critter yet. No call to be afeard of 'im, my dear, and missy'll learn to abide 'im likewise."

Evan edged round to another part of the crowd, the superior well-dressed part that was critical of style and bearing; and there he learned how the bride and bridesmaids were dressed, and how beautiful the bride really was after criticism had done its worst. He also learned that the church was fairly packed with notabilities of various kinds and degrees. Several "real, live" lords, it appeared, were witnessing the tying of the nuptial knot, and the worlds of politics and finance sent distinguished representatives. Three actual millionaires had been seen going in, and there were many who were described as immensely rich. But what particularly interested a group of talkative young ladies, whose mouths watered as they spoke, was that it would be perfect folly on the bride's part to hope to get through a tithe of her wealth.

"Fancy," cried one blushing maiden, "having more money than you know what to do with."

Upon this clatter of voices there suddenly broke the first bars of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and with a shout the crowd closed in about the door. Chancing to be on the

down; but as she emerged into
and, whether accidentally or from
they met his. One long, unwinki
gave him. There was no surprise
say she expected him, and he thc
deathly white face both pity and
head rang furiously; his veins were
her yet. There swept upon him a
in and take his own before the ass
would have called out, but his tongi
as he struggled for breath and ut
lovingly towards Florence.

"You shiver, darling," he said lo
ears. "Are you cold?"

"No, not cold," she answered, loc
again. The next moment the pair
and the crowd was exploding in ch

Evan turned with a cold sweat on
his way to the back. In the coi
she alone of the party had seen him.
flunkeys, carriages, and spectators
not conscious of the tumult. Wher
gone, and the crowd, having satisfie
to nothingness, he stood alone. A
costed him, the constable into whos
unceremoniously thrown.

"A fine wedding, sir"

"Hullo, Kinloch, where the dickens are you bound for at such a rate?"

He swung on his heel with a dry laugh.

"I'm not sure," he replied. "To hell, I think."

"Well! you needn't be in such a devil of a hurry over it," remarked the other.

"It's the devil that makes the hurry," said Evan, and laughed again. The other laughed also. Like Kinloch, he was an expectant member of the Bar; but, unlike Kinloch, he could afford to consult his private tastes while waiting for dead men's shoes. He had a father with a bank account.

"And is there a programme for this evening?" he inquired.

"None," returned Evan. "None whatever. That's left blank for my pleasure."

"Have you dined?"

"Dined! Yes, I should think so—dined and made a discovery. Addington, my boy, this is a d—— fine world, and those that inhabit it are, as my Shorter Catechism taught me to say, blest beyond redemption."

"Philosophic," said Addington, linking his arm in his friend's and turning with him eastward. "What of the liver, old man?" As he spoke Big Ben began to clang. "Eight," he observed. "Well! what's it to be?"

"Anything," answered Kinloch. "I have a fancy for hearing the chimes at midnight. And, Addington, as you love sport, cakes and ale while it is called to-day."

"Theatre to begin with," suggested Addington.

"The porch to the big furnace," said Kinloch. "Why not? A rattling tragedy, a weeping farce, as you like."

Addington ran over the list of available pieces.

"What say you to 'The Merchant of Venice?' " he asked.

"Gracious Potiphar!" cried Kinloch, "save us from the Jews. Shylock's too comical. I should want to take the knife out of his bungling hand and do that little bit of surgery. Not Shylock, Addington."

"I know, then," rejoined Addington confidently. And they turned into a Strand theatre.

Addington was making for the pit; but Kinloch had other plans.

"The gods," he said. "The gods for to-night. I want to criticise—aloud."

CHAPTER V

On looking into his mirror next morning Evan found it expedient to sit down quietly on the edge of his bed and make a reckoning with himself. The proceedings of the previous afternoon and evening hung mistily in the memory, and needed placing in clearer lights. There was the wedding with its grinning clamorous multitude—and the one poignant look of the bride, which smote like a white flame. But let that pass. What of the evening? Taking a heavy forehead in his hand he tried to think, to recall precisely what had happened. The retrospect was very dim, as it is apt to be in certain momentous crises. He must question Addington; Addington knew all about the ginger that is hot in the mouth; the lucky Addington, rich and not rejected, whole heart and full pocket. Assuredly the arch-satirist played cruelly with men's lots.

He took a turn about the room in half-whimsical debate.

"What's it to be Kinloch, my boy?" he asked as if addressing some one else. "Buckle to or not buckle to, steer or drift, keep her nose to the wind or turn tail and scud?" Perhaps the unshipping of a rudder was no great matter after all. If Fortune brings in boats that are not steered, why not ours as well as another? And if not—well! let the winds do their worst, let them sweep from their caves and make sport of the splitting barque. At least there would be the mad glee of going down among dancing elements.

With the reflection came remembrance of good counsel from Balliol, from Burnside, and above all from Pitweem Cottage.

"The third chapter of Proverbs," he said to himself. "Dear, simple, single-minded father! I'm to read the third chapter of Proverbs." It seemed purely ironical in the situation; but he would obey love's dictate—in heart he always obeyed his father—and see what came of it. Solomon was a wise man. With his seven hundred wives, not to speak of hangers-on, his strivings, his glories and humiliations, he could hardly help picking up his bits of useful knowledge, as the practical Lauchie would say.

Well! it would be seen what light and guidance lay in the famous Solomon.

In the thick of these cogitations the morning letters came, to change, a second time, the current of thought. There was one in Mr. Quinton's hieroglyphic hand marked "Urgent." How absurd! Mr. Quinton, of all men, ought to know that nothing in this world is really urgent, that the most burning matter imaginable might be left to burn itself out without the shadow of loss or inconvenience to the universe at large. Mr. Quinton was not yet a philosopher. None the less the letter was opened, and read.

"Come to me at half-past ten without fail," wrote Mr. Quinton in his cabalistic style.

Philosophy went promptly by the board. Evan looked eagerly at his watch.

"Time for a dip," he said to himself; and the next minute he was blowing in the luxury of a cold bath. It proved a particularly bracing bath that morning. It made the blood course with exhilarating speed and warmth; it cleared the foggy brain; it even gave an appetite for breakfast. The sun was beginning to gild the clouds.

Precisely at half-past ten Evan walked in upon Mr. Quinton. The greeting was that of friends over whose friendship no shadow has fallen. Noting the brightness of his visitor, the great lawyer got to business without so much as an allusion to the past.

"I am for the defendants in this case of Snowden *versus* Pomfrey," he explained. "Libel, you know, arising out of company promoting. That's the rock England will split on if she doesn't take care. An infernally complicated business in which, I am afraid, some financial reputations are likely to get blown upon. At the moment I confess it's as dark as the Cretan labyrinth, darker, by Jove, for there's not even the skein of thread. But D.V. we'll get light by-and-by. The point now is purely personal. Finding they had not selected a junior I proposed you. Kitter shook his head—you know how confoundedly stubborn he can be when he likes—spoke of your extreme youth, your inexperience, and all the rest of it. Thereupon my proposition became a *sine quâ non*, and with that my gentleman handsomely caved in. You accept the brief?"

"You are very good, sir," said Evan, the spirit of strife kindling in his bosom. "I thank you with all my heart."

"Very well. And to begin with you'll oblige me by blowing to smoke this pestilent superstition about the incapacity of youth. You're ready for the spring: take it."

Evan bowed, smiling. "Who is on the other side?" he asked.

"Faith, the other side's formidable. The Attorney-General leads, and with him are Bicker and Pragg. You must look out for some hacking and hewing."

"Three against two," remarked Evan.

"Three against two," repeated Mr. Quinton. "And all venerable sinners but yourself. Well, cheer up. Cling to the virtues and you'll get cured of youth. I am going to hand Kitter and his papers over to you—absolutely. We have about six weeks to get ready: for at least four I'll rely on you not to mention Snowden *v.* Pomfrey in my hearing. My poor head has as much as it can well contain. That murder trial comes on next week—a black affair from all I can make out. If the fellow's not put to bed by the hangman he'll be lucky. There's also that interminable case before the Lords cropping up again—and in short you'll spare me Snowden against Pomfrey for one clear month at least. To-day I have that wretched divorce case—it's marvellous how respectable people will drag themselves in the mud—and," glancing at his watch, "I'm due in court."

When the interview ended the junior found that the sun shone again; that the spheres had resumed their music.

For the next month he was buried almost out of sight in Snowden *v.* Pomfrey. Addington one day got a glimpse of him, rated him for a lucky dog, supposed he had got fortune fairly by the tail this time, hoped old Quinton would not prove too peppery, and went off regretting the loss of a promising comrade about town.

Assuredly Evan had no present time or mind to range. Snowden *v.* Pomfrey was a maze of darkness on which for a while it seemed impossible to get a ray of real light. Moreover, Kitter was troublesome. The fact is Mr. Kitter smarted under a slight. He had especially desired Quinton to give this important and perplexing case his personal attention, and lo! here it was, delivered cavalierly into the hands of a beardless youth, along with the name and fame of the great firm of Kitter and Kitter. It was too bad of Quinton, too bad. Poh! it was preposterous. Quinton carried altogether too high a nose. And Mr. Thomas Kitter

having himself that organ loftily pitched boiled over in resentment. Quinton should never have another case of his; never. And while Mr. Kitter lost his dignity and looked forward to losing his case as well, patiently as corals are built the evidence was sifted and illuminated.

At the end of five weeks Evan appeared before his chief laden with notes.

"Luminous," was the lightning-eyed leader's remark on going through them. "We'll do, I think. You must have done some probing."

At the trial the gladiators acquitted themselves in approved fashion. The Attorney-General, by turns impressively solemn and stupendously facetious, as became a Crown triton among the minnows, was very terrible. A famous cross-examiner, he was master of all the arts that reduce the timorous witness to a condition of utter imbecility and untrustworthiness. It was his practice in cross-examination to fix and terrify the trembling occupant of the box with a gaze; and his frowning "Now, sir, try to tell the truth," was commonly felt as a palpable conviction of hopeless proclivity to falsehood. Quinton was the only man at the Bar who was held to be his match; and that day the suave, seductive manner, the confidential tone, the apparently careless and irrelevant questioning, and, when the witness was committed, the flashing indignant face and the thundered "What do you mean by that, sir?" worked terrific havoc. The honours of defence were of course his, for it is part of the young barrister's business to sow that another may reap. But when judgment was entered for defendant with costs, and Mr. Kitter, oblivious of slights, was joyfully thanking and congratulating his friend Quinton, the generous leader did not forget his junior.

"There's the man who won your case, Kitter," he said, presenting Evan; and Kitter, smiling his broadest, bowed the bow that meant bread and wine.

"You have absolute confidence in young Kinloch?" he observed to Mr. Quinton when the two were alone.

"Absolute," returned Mr. Quinton. "And let me add it might be well worth Messieurs Kitter and Kitter's while to keep an eye on him. They'll need him again."

"I think," said Mr. Kitter very deliberately, "he's a coming man. Yes, I think he's a coming man."

CHAPTER VI

"A COMING man." Wherever or in whatever circumstances uttered, the words are magical. As the rising sun attracts the eye on which meridian splendours are lost, so the coming man with all his potentialities thick upon him is a more engaging figure than the hero of many fights laurel-crowned and past novelty. Interest and envy alike fasten on the climbing Titan. "What will he do?" "How far will he go?" "And why should he be singled out from his fellows?" are some of the questions asked with burnings and searchings of heart.

"Aspiring mediocrity," with which the Bar is as plentifully provided as any profession known among men, began to watch Kinloch narrowly, criticising, sneering, banefully winking and nodding and shaking the head according to mood and force of private jealousy. An exhaustless capacity for hard work being for the moment his chief characteristic, the critics admitted he had industry. It could not be denied, too, that he "got up" a case with remarkable rapidity, marshalled evidence clearly and with a divine sense of the essential, and knew no such thing as dismay. But as it was knowingly observed "devilling" was all very well. How would he do with a jury in a big case? Could he manage refractory witnesses? Would he toe the line in cross-examination? These were the things that tried a man; and it was modestly implied the brilliant Unbriefed were themselves admirably fitted to excel.

The criticisms which genial friends made a point of bringing to the subject's ears had no effect, save perhaps to produce a cheerful contempt. Too much a man of the world to be surprised by capering, too much of a humourist to take it to heart, Kinloch bore himself as if associates must needs be well wishers, and withal was quietly masterful. As increasing engagements cut off the possibility of sharing the diversions in which young bloods of the Bar delight he was voted grasping and self-centred. Some who found it impossible to forgive success even breathed the word "prig," luckily without his knowledge. On the other hand, impartial observers noted that when an opportunity arose he

sprang to it, and never missed. He was ever ready for emergencies; indeed, therein lay the chief difference between him and the idly envious who cavilled.

Moreover, he was Quinton's junior; Quinton who badgered powerful solicitors and treated the Bench as if even judges were human and fallible. That was much. But it was infinitely more that not once had he the shade of disagreement with a chief hot in temper, exacting, impatient, and scornful almost to cruelty of incapacity. There were aspirants whose nerves would have failed under the test had abilities been sufficient. When it was whispered that the distinguished leader at times deferred to his junior's judgment, the Briefless rose in a body and flatly declined to believe. Addington, in whose heart there was no room for envy, almost alone accepted the rumour as truth.

"Oh, you fellows may shout denial on the house-top," he said. "But I know Kinloch of old, and a man must have a strong back to march foot by foot with him. Let me tell you for your own good that when his colours fly for closer battle it's time to look out. He carries heavier guns than any he has yet brought into action; the Lord pity those on whom he turns his batteries. Quinton believes in him, as I happen to know from Quinton himself, and what is more, Kitter and Kitter believe in him. You mark me, Kinloch's their man."

To convince the great firm of Kitter and Kitter, solicitors to half the peers and most of the millionaires of England, was, indeed, more than to please Quinton, more for the present than the notice of the Lord Chancellor or the Prime Minister. Mr. Thomas Kitter no longer frowned when a case was handed over to "young Kinloch."

"He's a devil in disguise," he declared one day to Mr. Quinton.

"What an infinite pity we cannot have a few more devils like him," was the response.

"He takes tortuosities of evidence as a ferret explores a rabbit warren," said Mr. Kitter, who was an amateur sportsman. "If he doesn't disappoint as a pleader he'll one day step into Mr. Quinton's shoes."

"Never," replied Mr. Quinton emphatically. "Never. For he'll leap clean over them."

CHAPTER VII

AND, indeed, the progress had now the exhilarating velocity of the flying leap. Solicitors, grown suddenly appreciative, besieged with briefs; for it was as natural as the breaking of the dawn that where Kitter and Kitter led a competitive throng should press behind. Envy too was stirred into activity—unquestionable evidence of success. In the courts swelling jealousy gratified its malice by girding at meteoric phenomena and the judicial laxity that tolerated sensations in the very halls of justice. Such as were nursing places not yet vacant had fits of unhappiness at thought of an ambition for which circumstance itself helped to make an easy path, an ambition that might at any moment spring, God alone knew where or at what. The Midland Circuit, satisfied by tests of its own, frankly accepted the rising star; and Beltingham, moved by the memory of old times and present achievements, fêted him, the mayor and corporation pouring streams of oil on the anointed head. Mr. Dudley also, though unable to attend the banquet, gracefully remembered his old secretary. More significant still, judges, recognising that Mr. Kinloch was not of the aspiring bores who might be snubbed with impunity, were studiously civil. The momentary forgetfulness of one of them on this head (a lapse due to the inflaming influence of gout on a ferocious temper) furnished legal history with a savoury anecdote. It was a case involving points of some subtlety, and in the interests of his client Mr. Kinloch showed a nice concern for the intelligence of the jury. The Court, red-nosed and grumpy, found frequent excuse for interrupting. Counsel, however, kept the bridle-rein tight, meekly taking the goading as part of the business in hand. In course of argument he chanced to observe that no competent judge could possibly doubt the validity of the evidence he was submitting. To the Bench the opportunity was too good to be missed.

"But I doubt it," resounded in a growl through the chamber. It was the last straw.

Counsel paused a moment looking straight at the bent brows of his lordship.

"I said no *competent* judge, my lord," he remarked quietly.

The old Evan had broken bonds. Quinton, who sat close by, turned cold; the learned brethren of the Bar generally held their breath as for a scene of annihilation, while the Bench, seized with amazement, turned to so violent a purple that some feared apoplexy.

"Proceed, sir," said the Court severely, recovering from the shock; and counsel obediently went on to emphasise the fact that no competent judge could possibly doubt the validity of the evidence submitted. The sensation caused a twitter at dinner tables, and the jest has now an honoured place in the recorded facetiæ of the Bar. Mr. Proudfoot heard of it from Mr. Quinton, and replied with the incident of the Latin grammar and the parish minister.

"Tell me how he does in the stress of competition," wrote the dominie, after dilating on his old pupil's escapades; and the answer was "Precisely as you might expect—with astonishing nerve and dexterity. As to my private opinion of him, it will be sufficient to say that my son, who has done pretty well at the university, is now his pupil. If there's anything in the boy Kinloch's influence and example will bring it out."

Kinloch took his advancing fortune with open relish. While he could never learn to boast and was incapable of "airs," he was absolutely free from that nauseous form of egotism, the simpering modesty that turns on itself in feigned belittlement. That he reckoned the double-distilled essence of conceit. In reply to congratulations he admitted he was doing well. Nor was he less honest in estimating his own powers. He knew he deserved success, knew moreover he could now command it, and frankly enjoyed the harvest his gifts brought him.

But his sweetest pleasure was in doubling, trebling, quadrupling the monthly remittances to Pitweem. It grew till the recipients were forced to open a deposit account in Mr. Macdonald's bank in Aberfourie; and when they protested he professed shame for doing so little. People spoke of a rising star. They would have been astonished had they known that his chief recreation was to haunt the London shops for presents that would be acceptable in a lonely Highland strath. He gratified himself with a wide distribution. David and Jessie received continual surprises; Neil and Lisspeth were also remembered; the dominie had a special share, bestowed with a tact that charmed a proud

man; and, as the countryside knew, even Lauchie Duff was not forgotten.

"He's not of the kind that rise and kick away the ladder," Mr. Proudfoot declared a hundred times.

"Am persuaded o' that," said Lauchie once. "Just cock yer eye over the new rig-out I've gotten. An' what's mair, a bit siller in the pooch forbye. The laddie's hert's in the richt place yet."

"The richt place!" cried the dominie. "The richt place! you ungrateful old reprobate, is that your best word? What need has he to mind you or me, or anybody like us?"

"Guid sake," responded Lauchie, "was ever sic a man for pickin' a quarrel? Doon to yer knees; am ready to worship. The laddie's a guid laddie, an' a clever laddie. Could amaist lick yersel, dominie, at yer Greek an' Hebrew trash. Ave just ae regret—that I didna learn him the fiddle. It micht console him whiles when he's lonesome in Lunnon just to play an auld tune to himsel."

"Ay," snorted the dominie. "You're a man of real discernment. London's a lonesome place, and no doubt Mr. Kinloch would derive great comfort from scraping as you suggest."

Lauchie's brows arched maliciously.

"Oh, ho!" he cried. "So it's Mister Kinloch now, is it? What's come o' oor freend Evan, then? Man, it's a grand thing to be gettin' up in the world."

He whipped up the black fiddle, and with a satiric flourish struck a few bars of "Och, Hey Johnnie Lad." But he discreetly kept his distance from the dominie.

CHAPTER VIII

In the very opening of his career, while he was yet dreaming of briefs, Kinloch had studied the straightest course to fortune and found it ran through the House of Commons. That way, example told him, preferment lay.

"Only," Mr. Quinton warned him, "remember that the path is slippery beyond belief, and that a fall is commonly fatal. Stumble in the law courts and you may cover your

mistake, but blunder before the country and from that moment you are lost to grace. We owe that to a free Press."

The warning revived a puzzling question, to wit, how it came that Mr. Quinton's distinguished abilities had never landed him among the law officers of the Crown. Rumour gave various reasons; but one day while the two were in a confidential mood Evan ventured to ask if there had never been ambition for office.

"The question, I dare say, has occurred to many people," replied Mr. Quinton. "Well, I suppose that every one who enters Parliament has visions of glory. In that respect I was not odd. I had my castles in Spain like the rest, and probably came nearer actual possession than nine-tenths of those who remain for ever outside. It was a tight squeeze once for the Solicitor-Generalship; but hey-day! in dashed the dark horse and the dream vanished—to lie for ever among the wreckage of youth. If the Prime Minister were to invite me to the Woolsack to-morrow I would answer, 'Sir, you greatly honour me; but I am long out of love with baubles. Pray remember such as would like to sit near the head of the table.' I keep my seat in the House," Mr. Quinton added, "partly because I like it, partly from professional motives. But I am no longer ambitious for office. By the way, do you believe in luck?"

"A hard matter to answer," laughed Evan.

"I will put it in another way, then. You believe in your star?"

"Yes, I think I believe in my star."

"It is inevitable you should be in the House," said Mr. Quinton slowly. "Well, go ahead. But don't forget you are skating on very thin ice. And above all lay this truth close to your heart—there is no gratitude in governments. Use them if you can; for they will certainly use you if they can—and when you're used throw you away like a sucked orange, if you permit them."

A chance came sooner than was anticipated. The Member for Perthshire was gathered somewhat suddenly to his fathers; and after a hasty consultation with the party managers, brought about by Mr. Quinton, Evan went down to capture his native county. The party had another candidate in their eye; but if Kinloch must he must. So they sent an Olympian Under-Secretary of State to take care of him, for the constituency was important.

In at least part of Logieburn, man, woman, and child were with the young candidate. The dominie girded his loins for the great battle of his life; Red Sandy, following the example of his friend Pitweem, not only made public profession of his faith and intentions, but put his gig, his horses, and carts at the service of the election agent; and Lauchie, sniffing provender in the wind, chivalrously insisted on aiding.

Aberfourie was hotly divided. Dr. Forbes, with as many clansmen as would answer summons, hoisted the Kinloch colours; but the Rev. Murdoch Macnair, blowing a terrific blast on the clerical horn, took the field in opposition. Mr. Macnair desired to be told what enlightened electors were asked to do. Was it supposed they had lost their senses? or were they expected to insult the dignity of Parliament by perpetrating a clumsy joke? His reverence wished to be perfectly fair, but he had to confess that the acme of the ridiculous had been reached. Presumption could go no further. The dominie, snorting like a curbed war-horse, prayed God for the opportunity of meeting some one on a dark night—and alone.

As a preliminary to action he closed school, an act of contumacy for which Mr. Macnair intimated an intention of having him dismissed. The dominie, looking doubly grim, retorted he awaited dismissal and promised fun for the occasion. In giving his scholars a holiday he meant to follow his hero about the county, were it only to applaud; but on consideration he was content to read the speeches in the *Scotsman* and the *Dundee Advertiser*, to demonstrate to Neil ten times a day the unspeakable blessing of such a nephew, to preach political doctrine to backsliders, to congratulate the pleased and puzzled David, and reserve his strength for the mass meeting at Aberfourie.

That meeting is remembered among Logieburn politicians to this day. An Earl took the chair, and the Under-Secretary of State, mindful that the eyes of Downing Street were upon him, rose gallantly to the occasion. Fired by his high example, the local fighters vowed to make it hot for the enemy. It was to be do or die and no quarter. So the bonnets went up with a rousing "hooch" and the air sang merrily with hostile weapons.

Neil and the dominie and Red Sandy accepted seats on the platform; but David, slipping in as if attendance at his

son's meeting were an indictable offence, hid with Jessie in the midst of the densely packed audience.

"I can see and watch better here," he told her; but his private feeling was, "Others will have less chance of seeing and watching me." Lauchie occupied a conspicuous position in the rear, ready to strike up the moment a fresh war note should be needed.

"I've keepit an eye on the laddie this mony a year," he told a neighbour confidentially, "an' am no' goin' to forsake him noo."

In his opening speech the Earl did the handsome thing by the government and the candidate; and in his turn the Under-Secretary of State first playfully impaled the Rev. Murdoch Macnair on an epigram, and then gave Mr. Kinloch a glowing testimonial, dwelling on his brilliant university record and his doings at the Bar.

"I understand," said the orator, "that this very remarkable career, a career which as yet is but in its beginning, opened in your own local academy." Whereupon the audience with one vociferous accord called upon Mr. Sinclair to stand up and let them see him; also to inform them how many more barristers and Members of Parliament he had in concealment. When the tumult abated Neil and Mr. Proudfoot were discovered in heated altercation behind the Under-Secretary. Pitweem was pushing the dominie forward, and the dominie was angrily but idly resisting.

"Misther Proudfoot, sir," said the perspiring Neil, turning a beaming face up at the Olympian, "he iss the man that will do it, sir."

"For God's sake hold your tongue, Pitweem," pleaded the dominie.

"What I will tell you, sir, is quite true," persisted Neil. "He iss the man that did it."

The Under-Secretary of State, who had paused smiling, bowed as if he understood perfectly what was darker than Coptic, then went on affably to explain the duty of the electors, and the urgent need there was for having such a man as his friend Kinloch in Parliament.

He sat down cool, suave, self-collected where most were streaming and wild with excitement. Evan took his place, and it seemed the sudden hurricane must unroof the pavilion. They were proud of him. He was so clever, did such wonderful things away in the boastful South, and

withal was so boyish; it was but the other day that he ran the streets with his chubby face and the satchel of books from which he had extracted so much. And here he was, God bless him! going to be a Member of Parliament. The hurricane raged yet higher. Behind, Lauchie struck up "Auld Lang Syne," and or ever they knew it they were roaring furiously about "paidling in the burn," about "braid seas," "trusty freres," "pint-stoups," and "cups o' kindness." David sat with Jessie's hand tightly clasped in his, and his eyes glistening. What was this that had come upon him?

The singers exhausted themselves, and then for the first time the presence of the enemy was discovered. Evan proceeded in a fusillade of interruptions and contradictions. Presently a personal taunt was flung from the back. The speaker passed on unheeding, but the dominie sprang from the platform and made for the door, an ugly look in his face. The speaker stopped. The audience, rising unconsciously, turned their eyes on the figure passing swiftly down the centre, and there fell a dead hush. What was going to happen? The question was answered almost before it could be asked. Clutching a man with the grip of a vice, the dominie dragged him sprawling from among his fellows.

"I know who sent you here, Peter McCulloch," said the master from between his teeth. "And you'll just go back with my compliments and say there's no room."

"Will I though?" retorted Peter, struggling to get into an attitude of defence.

"Indeed will you, Peter," rejoined the dominie, "if you were thrice as good a man as you are." And the next moment Peter was breathing curses outside, for the spirit of his athletic days was upon Mr. Proudfoot. Slipping back, he invited Peter's friends to follow into the fresh air, and half-a-dozen giants felt constrained to take the hint and go.

"They're better out," observed Mr. Proudfoot to the fat village constable, who had bustled upon the scene when all was over. "If they think of coming back just whistle to me."

Thereupon he returned to the platform, apologising for the interruption, and for two deafening minutes he was a public hero.

With a humorous allusion to absent friends, Evan resumed amid increased enthusiasm. Some one reminded him of *Tir nan beann nan gleann's nan gaisgaich*, and he gave the

appropriate response in their mother tongue, turning their ardour to a frenzy. The Olympian from Downing Street whispered in the Earl's ear his ignorance of the fact that Kinloch knew Hebrew.

"Older than Hebrew," laughed the Earl, who was a good Highlander. "It's Adam's tongue, the Gaelic—noblest of human speech."

"Ah," remarked the Olympian, afraid of his ear-drums. "It must be noble indeed to produce such a pandemonium."

Lapsing into the Saxon tongue, the candidate went on briskly, raking his opponents so effectually that the dominie could scarce keep his seat for joy. As for David, he sat entranced and bewildered, now thrilling with rapture, now asking himself whether this could really be his Evan who was hurling the thunderbolts and eliciting the volleys of applause. And as his mind swayed and swirled there came to him thoughts of one who was not there. What would *she* say if she saw her boy now? But she did see him, for God would not deny her this sweet sight. Once Jessie looked at her father with a remark on her tongue, and at the sight of his face turned away without speaking, her vision all at once become uncertain.

Evan concluded to salvos that made the Under-Secretary hastily cover his ears, and Lauchie, with the instinct of an artist, broke in with "Dainty Davie." But for once Mr. Duff fiddled in vain. For the electors, pressing uproariously about their candidate, were far above music. In a partial lull the essential resolutions were passed; then the candidate and his particular friends were borne off to the Inver Arms, that the Government envoy might taste Highland hospitality. The guests included David and Neil and Mr. Proudfoot, Red Sandy, Dr. Forbes, and Mr. Sinclair. Lauchie too was there, "for," said he oracularly, "fowk that feast maun hae music."

CHAPTER IX

THE Clan Kinloch fought Titanically, but the Macnair legions, plenteously furnished with heavy ordnance and munitions of gold, were not to be beaten. So that the Rev. Murdoch, planting himself fast on the Scriptures, the practical and pious man, was able to give a triumphant illustration

of the apothegm about a prophet's honour in his own country and among his own people. Neil swore truculently over the thing, vowing to change his religion forthwith; and the dominie, whose thoughts were chiefly secular, indulged in language which to Lauchie's delicate nostrils suggested brimstone. David, with most cause of disappointment, was most resigned.

"God is wise and not negligent in the affairs of men," was his comment. "If he wants Evan in Parliament, Evan will be in Parliament. Don't you trouble, Neil."

"Don't you trouble!" cried Neil indignantly. "Gott tam me, Tavit! but I will wonder to hear you speaking. I will pay steepind and sustentation and sorees with the daft magic lantern things tancing like teffles on the walls, ay, and more too whatever, and my own meenister that iss paid for praying and preaching crowing like a bantam cock because Evan iss licked. Fuich, fuich, I will not listen at all too."

Red Sandy, who witnessed the outburst, noted it was the only occasion on which he had ever heard the dominie applaud a sentiment of Neil's, heart and soul, without reservation.

Meanwhile, Evan had hurried back to London, his passion for politics rather inflamed than damped by rejection. He wooed again and was lucky. Scarcely had the excitement at Pitweem and Aberfourie died out when tidings came that he was returned for the English borough of Rockhampton.

"The rascal!" cried the dominie, "and never a word about it."

From that moment Pitweem, which had wavered, thought well of the Sassenach.

"The podies will haf some sense in their noddles after all," observed Neil, epitomising the general opinion. Whereupon he began to smile so contentedly that he clean forgot to change his religion; and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair preached in peace.

"Hoo do we stand noo then?" Lauchie inquired, looking in on Mr. Proudfoot. "The Richt Honiruble Evan Kinloch, M.P., eh? We'll be gettin' screeds o' clavers in the papers aboot him like ither braw and michty fowk. It'll be Mister Kinloch on this an' Mister Kinloch on that, an' the Member for—what is't—Cockrampton?—says this, an' thinks the other thing. God, hoo some fowk flee up! I

wish he'd tell an auld fiddler hoo to mak crazed banes kind o' easy. A'll change my trade."

"I would," said the dominie.

"Ay," said Lauchie, doubtfully. "An' maybe ye micht dae the same yersel. Ye'd be none the waur o' a new coat like the rest o' us. Me and you's like to be millionaires preceesely in the same moment o 'time. Greek an' Hebrew pys just as weel as fiddlin' by a' appearance, just as weel, an' d—— a hair better. Hoo lang hev I had the pleasure o' your acquaintance, dominie?"

"Longer than I care to remember," retorted the dominie, ominously. "I've no present mind to rake up my disgrace."

Lauchie's head went up with a snort.

"Disgrace!" he repeated. "Disgrace, indeed! Ye've been gled o' my help afore noo for a' yer fine airs an' soberness. Ye maun allow I aye stood the drink better than you. When you were blin' I was just gettin' herty. Many's the helpin' hand I gied ye. But ane o' the drawbacks o' gettin' auld is that yer services are forgotten, ay, blotted oot an' clean forgot. A'll lay my grievances before the Member for Cockrampton."

"And if he helps it won't be the first time," said the dominie.

"No," admitted Lauchie. "No. I never denied that Mr. Evan Kinloch's hert's in the richt place. There's ae service mair he'll hae to do me ane o' thir days."

"What's that?" asked the dominie.

"Oh, just provide the kist men tak their lang sleep in. He'll no let my banes fa' to the parish. The thocht o' bein' chappit wi' a poorhouse spade's no comfortin', dominie. I've been a wanderer for thirty years, thirty years every day o't, an' I've laid me doon in barns an' byres an' sheds an' roadside ditches, but I aye keepit oot o' the poorhouse. They nearly nailed me ance, but I joukit them; an', man, I widna like them to get me in the hinder end. D'ye think, dominie, I could jouk them again?"

"It might be arranged," said the dominie.

"Ye micht maybe arrange it yersel, dominie—just for the sake o' what's past. Ye micht speak till Evan aboot it. If I was to dee afore ye there would be nae need to trouble the laddie, for I could rely on yersel. But yer never sure o' deein'."

He paused smiling as if a bright idea had struck him.

"Man, dominie," he explained, "a droll thing cam owre me the ither nicht. There was a bit text my old schulemaister used to tell us—he was a man wi' a grand grey head an' routh o' Greek an' Hebrew like yersel—he used to tell us laddies and lassies a bit text, an' the ither nicht, when I was sae fashed an' forfoughten I couldna sleep, the thing kept runnin' in my head. I mind the words fine. 'They shall come from the East and from the West and from the North and from the South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God.' Of every colour and kindred and tongue, mark you; wanderers a' comin' hame. Man, it'll be a great sicht. An' they'll hae music there by a' accoonts, maybe fiddles, wha kens? I canna think what put it in my head."

"You're fey," suggested the dominie.

An expression of mingled terror and horror came into Lauchie's face.

"Ye dinna think am deein'?" he asked, the sudden dread making his voice shrill. "As sure's am a leevin' man ye gie me the cauld grue."

"A chilly thing," said the dominie with an indifference he was far from feeling. "Well! there's a sheep's head in the pot, and we'll expect you at dinner-time."

"D'ye mean it?" cried Lauchie in his natural tones, the love of eating proving too strong for the fear of death. "Forgie a' hard an' thochtless words. Sheep's head! The Lord make us truly thankfu'! next to haggis the best thing in a' the world. An', dominie, ye'll maybe hae something to drink oor freend's health in."

"I wouldn't wonder," replied the dominie; "you and I owe him that."

"It's God Almichty's truth," declared Lauchie with unction. "It's God Almichty's truth."

CHAPTER X

THE Member for Rockingham took his place inconspicuously a few benches behind Mr. Dudley and Mr. Quinton, who sat side by side. The latter averred that since Burke had brought the wonders of universal knowledge and the eloquence of imperial genius within the four walls of the Com-

mons no fuller man than Kinloch ever entered that assembly of illustrious intellects. He was in no haste, however, to make his fulness known. Finding the legislative machine complicated, he set himself with his customary diligence to study its mechanism, or more explicitly to master the niceties of parliamentary procedure. For it needed no wiseacre to tell him that in stress of action tactical skill is more than strength.

As a speaker he began prudently by eschewing the florid. He did not seize Thor's hammer to break bubbles, nor thunder and lighten about nothing. From all such extravagance of effort an innate sense of fitness effectually preserved him. His style indeed was characterised by a Dantesque economy and moderation. Simple, lucid, spontaneous, familiar, French in grace and lightness of touch, Celtic in persuasiveness, his utterances were ever pat to the matter in hand. Withal he had the gift of pungency, knew how to take an adversary deftly on the hip, was not above an accidental epigram, and had the knack of dropping phrases which stuck in men's memories. An engaging presence, and a voice of remarkable compass and sweetness, were also part of his equipment. It was said of him that he was everything but dull.

He had not spoken thrice when the House noted with joy that here was one who could make his arrow quiver in the mark, one who understood the use and resources of the English language, and needed but the occasion to blaze into oratory. What for immediate success was of yet greater importance, he quickly learned the temper and disposition of the House. He preached no sermons, and for the present at least was not greatly concerned about abstract principles. The fact that for the most part he abstained from instructing his elders pleased the faithful Commons, who have a wholesome aversion to didactic bores. On the other hand, the Whips remarked an independence of tone and thought, not aggressive they had to own, but plainly existent, and wondered about his docility in the evil day of a party crisis. They could but be polite, and hope for the best.

Greater potencies than Whips bent an attentive eye, Mr. Gasten, the People's Tribune, for example, and the brilliant Mr. Distoire, twice Prime Minister, and though of alien blood and despised race, the glory of aristocratic England.

These men being in almost equal degree the idols of the House, their smallest nod of approval had an exhilarating sweetness. To the political novice (often to the political veteran) their serious notice was fair intoxication; for did they not hold the party loaves and fishes? Both were judges of men as well as of oratory, and the need of fighting lieutenants made them quick to detect ability. Mr. Distoire had perhaps the keener eye and the readier sympathy for merit struggling uphill. He had himself stormed the fortress in the teeth of fierce hostilities. But he had long since perfected the subjugation of his party; and now his dictates were gospel. Unhappily his flag flew over the wrong camp; yet that did not prevent him from being gracious to the young Member for Rockhampton when the two chanced to meet at the dinner-table of a millionaire who cultivated notabilities.

"You are not Saxon?" said the great man in the course of a conversation.

"On the contrary, sir, I have the misfortune to be of their enemies the Celts," answered Evan.

"Ah! not Saxon I knew," pursued Mr. Distoire. "I am greatly interested in racial questions. I love to observe the effects of blood and temperament on the fortunes of governments and political parties. The world, you know, likes to delude itself with little fictions, and one of those little fictions relates to what men call the science of politics. Now science, as I understand it, implies undeviating methods. The popular imagination would make us all mere wheels and cogs in a machine operated by natural laws. Is the political machine so operated, think you? In a sense perhaps it is—dodging is natural to the fox, but we should not wish to see the suggestion followed out. I don't trouble myself very much about machines, but I avow myself a student of men. The man, I tell you, is everything. I study him in all moods. Sometimes when I am exposed to a withering fire from my friends on the other side, I amuse myself by watching the skill, analysing the motives and impulses of those who attack."

The words were spoken with a whimsicality which made it difficult to comment. Perhaps the great man saw this, for he immediately went on:

"Officially I have been compelled to study the Celts of Ireland—a fascinating people; but the Celts of Scotland are

less in the public eye." And with that he began to pour out questions concerning the Highlanders, their ways, their characteristics, their language, their history.

"There are two wonderful races leavening our civilisation to-day," he observed presently. "The Jews and the Celts. Whatever we have of the spiritual or inspirational we derive from those two sources. Some day our philosophers will perhaps discover that. Well! go on. Personally I should be interested in seeing the Celtic race give a great law officer to the Crown."

And smiling enigmatically, the great man turned to a noble lord who claimed his attention.

Some evenings later while the Member for Rockhampton was doing a little sharpshooting, Mr. Distoire, looking across the House, remarked with a little sigh in the ear of a colleague scarcely renowned for brilliancy, "I wish I had him to keep the country squires in amusement by giving them something to talk about." Mr. Gasten too was complimentary on the occasion.

But the courts still did most alike for purse and reputation. Briefs were plentiful, fees went up, and the bigger they grew the more widely and warmly Mr. Kinloch's services were appreciated. So fast his income increased that he sometimes doubted whether it was quite fair to take so much. Mr. Quinton salved his conscience on the point.

"You hardly seem to realise," he said, "that Mr. Kinloch is rapidly pushing into the very front rank of his profession. He owes that profession something. He can best discharge the debt by keeping up his fees. Pray do not forget that the world is disposed to take a man, particularly a successful man, at his own valuation; and on broader grounds than the purely personal he must not make himself too cheap."

Mr. Kinloch bowed to the dictum.

Professional and social popularity went together. Ambitious hostesses "discovered" the brilliant barrister and rising Member of Parliament, and he made a figure at dinner-tables and receptions. These honours also came as a flood, for when Mother London opens her opulent arms, her profusion is without stint or limit. His genealogy being obscure, Society complaisantly provided him with a pedigree. People whispered rapturously of a certain

clan *Kinloch* which had covered itself with lurid glories in times when heroes acted on

> The good old rule . . . the simple plan
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.

The doings of this clan were so desperately fascinating that they must be mentioned with bated breath, and this trenching on the forbidden brought delicious tinglings of sensibility. It appeared that in the dark ages, when Bonnie Prince Charlie, of sentimental memory, held court in craggy grottoes among the rude heather with the beautiful Lady Flora, barefooted, unwashed, unkempt, by his side, the Kinlochs performed fearful acts of spoliation and valour, such as quaffing the blood of enemies as if it were wine, burning churches over the heads of trapped congregations, carrying off lovely damsels at dead of night, and other deeds too delightfully horrible to be mentioned. Pondering these things, romantic beauty wondered dreamily how Mr. Kinloch would sustain the fame of his ancestors in capturing lovely maidens; and to many the fact that the blood of a long line of intrepid lawbreakers ran in his veins was at once a source of picturesque interest and a cause of speculation.

The more worldly spoke of his high prospects. "Monstrously clever, my dear," a dame of fashion once said, eyeing him critically through her gold-rimmed *lorgnette*. "Mr. Distoire, you know, goes out of his way to be agreeable to the young man, and Mr. Gasten's special study is to conciliate him. As for the law, he's a perfect prodigy they tell me—sure of the Chancellorship or something of that kind." So well dames of fashion understand these obscure and difficult matters.

The main thing was that he was accepted and caressed. But, though the situation suited his sociable disposition, vanity could not have him by beckoning; for his pride had a weazel alertness, and more than once he offended in high quarters by declining to twitch the dragon's tail. In a word, he was more independent than diplomatic, a defect of his race. With these opportunities of mingling with the shining ones of earth he found his keenest pleasure in the circle of familiar friendship, and in maintaining touch with his old university and so with European thought. He was often at Oxford to meet foreign nota-

bilities. A master of many tongues, he liked to talk to distinguished foreigners; but most of all he loved to drop in informally upon Mr. Quinton in the privacy of Palace Gardens to discuss things pertaining neither to law nor to politics. In that cultivated home he found a delectable resting-place for soul and heart. The bright, travelled, innocently gay household, with its suggestions of the warmth and clearness of Greece and Italy, its interest in things intellectual, its vivacity, sincerity, and unfailing good sense gave him precisely what he most relished. Divers matters were entwined to make his welcome cordial. He took such pains with his pupil, Reginald Quinton, LL.B., that the young man found amusement in "bowling over the governor" upon difficult points; and at such times the prostrate governor would look up smiling and remark, "I see Mr. Kinloch has been coaching you."

Be it remembered also that the all-knowing Reginald had two charming sisters, blithesome Graces hanging luringly between girlhood and womanhood, with honest English roses in their cheeks, brave lights in their eyes, and hearts that beat quickly to soft ideals. Vera and Ethel Quinton had the charm which comes of freshness, intelligence, high spirits, sympathy, good looks, good temper, in short, a perfect harmony of mind and body. They got a hint of Mr. Kinloch's history on the tender side, and secretly would have rejoiced in binding up his wounds. And there were moments when it seemed he would have received such charity at such hands with a feeling considerably warmer than gratitude. Whence it came to pass that Mrs. Quinton revolved certain problems concerning a young lady's chief end in life. For a while they were kept to herself; but presently her husband's aid was invoked in solving them. Mr. Kinloch and Vera seemed very good friends—she was on the verge of twenty—girls must not miss their chances, and in a word, what of Mr. Kinloch?

"I'll tell you, my dear," replied Mr. Quinton gravely: "Mr. Kinloch has loved once for all."

"Once for all?" echoed Mrs. Quinton. "That's all you know of men. Once for all, indeed! He'll be married within a year; and why shouldn't he?"

"For no reason in the world, my dear, except that I don't think he will," was the answer.

a wedding, and it was Vera's. Not long another, and this time it was Ethel's. Y visit Palace Gardens, an ever-welcome the disappointment of fervent hopes. I garding him with a wistful motherly thought what a son-in-law was lost. Othe with pity were at some pains to secu But the lure of charming, well-dowered One lady, several years a grandmother a of ambiguous motives, rated him soundly the sex.

"Fancy what it would be," she cried, c ing clusters of silver ringlets at him. would be if all the eligible young men fo ample. What a plight England would b girls breaking their hearts and never a Think shame of yourself, sir."

"Is it not solacing, madam, to think tha men pay no heed whatever to my example smiling. "I think you and I may divest anxiety about the extinction of the race."

"You heathen!" laughed the old lady, sl lets yet more menacingly. "Congratula the stake has gone out of fashion.—Poor marked in relating the conversation, "I'm s fully lonely. I think our girls are without prize go. Well, my dear, I'm seventy- h

political ambition. He was to make his fortune by marriage, after the way of the world. Florence could say little, but in her heart was a commotion of joy and jealousy—joy at the prospect of his swift elevation, and jealousy at his daring to replace or be happy without her. She waited in vain for the fateful event; and presently learned that the belle had bestowed hand and dowry on some one else. The incident and the tattle it occasioned had scarce the dignity of a ripple on a restless sea, and were forgotten the moment they were past—by all save one. In Florence they revived thoughts and memories which had to be kept secret as the grave; for with all her splendours she had not one poor soul with whom she could share a confidence. A past rising thus in a woman's imagination may lead to tragedy. If rebellious thoughts haunted Florence she had the sense and force of will to smother them. But it was a hard thing to crush the secrets of the heart; an impossible thing to keep from doubtful musing when pleasure and social grandeur left her a quiet moment.

One day, in the height of the season, as her carriage made part of the flood of equipages in the vicinity of Hyde Park Corner, she gave a convulsive little start upon catching the swift passing glance of a man on horseback. It was on her tongue to cry out to the lady by her side that that was Mr. Kinloch of whom people talked; but she had just self-command enough to shut her mouth tight; and her companion, who was talkative, could not understand why she all at once became so silent.

As time passed, she heard more and more of Evan; saw his name, with increasing frequency, in the newspapers; and she gathered that he was heaping success upon success, both in the courts and in the House of Commons.

"He's on the high road for office," she had heard her father say; and she asked herself if there breathed one who understood as well as she his fitness for any office England had to bestow. What people were beginning to find out now she had known long ago. She knew him—to the core. Ah, well! it had been her dream to soar with him; for she believed with all her heart in the aristocracy of intellect. Moreover, like all true women, she was a hero-worshipper.

Perhaps it was to give the instinct play that she got

occasion was a debate on one of the
touching the regeneration of Ireland.

"You have studied the Irish question
she said, encouragingly, "and of course l
of the majority."

"Of course," assented her husband, d

In a certain calendar that evening w
for ever memorable. A fierce battle wa
Mr. Distoire himself led a magnificently
In a manner which some called flippant,
was brilliant, he poured in a deadly fire
having satisfied himself with havoc, stro
out in a hubbub of excitement, leaving tl
his wounds. A member of the Oppositi
upon his heels came one who nearly a
feat of emptying the House. He sat dow
ham rose, palpitating, and big with the
speech. In the same instant Mr. Kin
without, it was believed, noticing the ot
a momentary pause. The Member fc
caught the Speaker's eye, and Mr. Lar
with a helpless look at the ladies' galler

Kinloch began with the electric quiet
a storm. As he disdained small game, h
more than one occasion, given Mr. Disto
mettle. The famous leader was at fir
loftily ironical, passing by degrees to

disinterested a spirit, a spirit so far above the weakness of ordinary humanity, that he was able to recreate himself with pleasantries upon the woes of millions of his fellow-subjects.

"I am sure," pursued the orator, "we must all envy that light and equable disposition which gaily accepts the calamities of his kind as providential means of gratifying a personal taste for amusement. Philosophy, sir, has been aptly defined as the enchanting science which enables us to bear up under the afflictions of others. The Right Hon. gentleman is the sprightliest philosopher who ever converted public misery to private pastime since Heaven was pleased to damp the gaiety of nations by quenching the merriment of Voltaire. The Roman poet found probity praised and kicked out of doors. In our day inscrutable Wisdom reserves that fate for political fidelity. The Right Hon. gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury, was not always the model of political insensibility which, to-day, makes him the shining avatar of a legion of mimetic scoffers. History, which delights in satire, relates that, in his unguided—I had almost said his intemperate—youth, not only did he pose as the friend of the human race, incredible as it may seem, but indulged in impassioned flirtations with the sorrowful lady of the Shamrock. What fervent nothings the lover whispered in a greedy ear need not now be considered. Enough that the lady smiled and dried her tears. It seemed that, after endless falsities, her true cavalier had come at last, and the romantic spoke of the revival of chivalry. They forgot, sir, the fickleness of political affection. The favours granted and the fit of wooing past, the gallant grew cold, talked vaguely of platonic friendship and the necessity of avoiding a scandal. In vain the lady's minstrel sang of wooers who never forget. The poet could not have been aware of the happy convenience of some memories. The Right Hon. gentleman did forget. And now, when the discarded flame cries out in her distress, imploring him, by the memory of former vows, for aid—he replies, mockingly, with chains and a gag."

In the midst of a thunderous explosion, Mr. Distoire, who had been told what was going on, re-entered the House, ogling the orator mischievously with his eyeglass. A palpitating listener in the ladies' gallery strove ineffectually to hide her emotion, and the Speaker had gravely

to call hon. members to order. Mr. Distoire sat down with an amused smile, settling into the listless attitude he affected when profoundly interested.

In deepening excitement the Member for Rockhampton went on to describe the political perfidies of the Prime Minister, and to tell how, for "domestic and other reasons," the Right Hon. gentleman, ignoring pledges and turning his back upon sentiment, made love to metaphysics.

"So successful have his later devotions been," observed Mr. Kinloch scornfully, "he is now in a position to announce to an anxious world that Hamlet was undoubtedly *compos mentis* and beyond all question right when he declared 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so!' Sir, this assurance from the mouth of a responsible Minister of State cannot fail to soothe and comfort men and women groaning in the yoke or bleeding under the lash of fate. Like all great discoveries, the panacea is magical in its simplicity. The wretched and starving have but to imagine themselves happy, contented, free, prosperous, and presto! the hut is a palace, famine turns to plenty, hunger is appeased, rags are regal purple, aches and pangs delicious titillations, thraldom becomes liberty, and the desolate land flows with milk and honey. So the nurse furnishes the fretful child with a rattle, telling it to play itself and its fancied ills will vanish. I ask, sir, who would not purchase happiness at so cheap a rate?"

Mr. Distoire bent towards his nearest colleague, remarking, "Confound the fellow, he has broken into my armoury and stolen my weapons."

The orator swept on, the House, now hanging eagerly on his lips, fell into a tense silence, listening with all its senses save when it broke into applause. A swift change came over his manner, as, passing from the personal and abandoning invective, he came to deal with the details of the measure before them. Though he spoke with a studied restraint, as if afraid to give his feelings rein, there was a ring in his voice as he clinched argument after argument that thrilled like a bugle call. Mr. Gasten fairly turned on his seat that he might not miss a word or a gesture, and Mr. Quinton and Mr. Dudley followed his example. Even Mr. Langham forgot he had in his pocket a maiden speech which could never be delivered. Mrs. Langham bent forward in her place in the gallery, fascinated and on fire.

The peroration, throbbing with passion, swelled in a note of denunciation that made hostile listeners tingle while holding them captive. He referred to the ideals of statesmanship, quoted aphorisms from Burke about little minds and great empires going ill together, and precepts from Bacon about laws; and when, with a sweeping, and dramatic gesture, he called upon the House to fling the *disjecta membra* of this iniquitous Bill in the faces of those who dared thus to insult a whole people, the effect was to make many start from their seats.

"By God, that's oratory," said Mr. Distoire, carried out of himself. And as he spoke a tumult of acclamation confirmed the opinion.

Driving home a little later, Mr. and Mrs. Langham discussed the speech. Asked what she really thought of it, Florence replied, "I would give a thousand pounds that it had been delivered by my husband."

In next morning's *Times* it was reported in the first person, besides being honoured with a trenchant leader, and Evan Kinloch was famous.

CHAPTER XII

Honours, like troubles, come not single spies but in battalions. While the country still rang with the sensation of the assault on Mr. Distoire and the prophets of the Press were hotly disputing over ultimate results, the man most concerned was quietly taking breath for a long leap in another arena. It was a time of public discords, or convulsions, rashness, despair, and Crown prosecutions, of fear and trembling in high places, and dire uncertainty everywhere. Men began to talk dolefully of the horrors of a revolution and to picture streets running with blood. Happily England has a standing army, and the sight of gleaming bayonets and gun muzzles kept Demos from the worst. But from out the seething chaos there crystallised charges involving, not only the honour of a political leader, but the existence of a political party. In this new sensation all other sensations were swallowed up. The accusers

were powerful and pertinacious; the accused fierce and full of denials; the nation, thrown into excitement and perplexity, demanded investigation.

Thus obliged to do something, the Government resolved upon a public inquiry, and a Special Court was constituted. Mr. Quinton led for the defence, Mr. Kinloch and another being joined with him. Against them were the full forces of the Government, and a prejudice more formidable still, for at a fancied defect of loyalty honest John bristles, making judgment jump with suspicion. Obeying an instinct for sport, Society took the proceedings under its patronage, crowding the court day after day with quickened zest, despite the dreary mass of technical detail which had to be sifted. At the end of a fortnight it got its first delectable thrill.

Mr. Kinloch had cross-examined one of the principal witnesses without damaging his opponents. The Court adjourned for luncheon, and while the three friends were snatching a hasty meal together the leader remarked a little wearily to Kinloch:

"You will cross-examine the next witness."

Had Kinloch been struck in the face he could not have been more startled.

"But, sir," he protested, "remember he is the most important witness in the case. Surely you will do the cross-examination yourself?"

"No," said Mr. Quinton. "No. I do not feel very well. You must do it."

Kinloch's appetite forsook him, and he returned to court with the ugly conviction that he was about to wreck his reputation. The witness he was to tackle, a man of knowledge and experience, was so well known for his shrewdness, that it was whispered he was likely to prove more than a match for the ablest cross-examiner in London. Besides, there was absolutely no material to go on, a want which rendered the situation doubly difficult. When the crucial moment came Kinloch rose with a dry mouth and an ominous feeling of emptiness. It was only by a vigorous effort of will he saved himself from imagining the whole fabric of the case collapsing about his head.

The manner in which the duel opened made Mr. Quinton hot and anxious. The witness, it seemed, was going to justify the hopes of his friends. Self-possessed, laconic,

deft in parrying, and ever ready to fall back on the privilege of *non mi ricordo*, he held his own. His manner had even something of the contempt of Goliath for the stripling David. Once when he loftily advised counsel to shake some other oak it appeared he was carrying the war into the enemy's country. All at once, and while he was in the cock-a-hoop mood, a chance shot told. Kinloch put a question over which the too confident witness blundered. Quick as lightning another, arising out of the first, was upon him, and he blundered again. A third made matters worse.

"Kinloch's got him," some one whispered excitedly. "He's got him, he's got him."

Assuredly Kinloch had him. Step by step the broken and unhappy witness was led by ways which he knew not to a place that was thorny and stifling and very dark. There he was dissected, himself incontinently holding the light. When he faltered or protested, as in the chagrin of self-committal he sometimes did, the tormentor was ruthlessly upon him.

"Come, come, sir, pull yourself together; the court is waiting for your answer." And he would meekly bring forth another damning secret. The spectators sometimes tittered, sometimes listened in a breathless stillness. Mr. Quinton vowed he had never before seen such a process of annihilation in a court, while the rest of the Bar smiled, nodded, and whispered meaningly—all save counsel for the prosecution, who sat with faces lengthening by the ell. When at last, with a kind of cooing sweetness more ominous than the sternest words and looks, Kinloch remarked, "Thank you, that is all I wish to know," every competent judge present knew that the case for the other side was shattered.

"You've done it," was Mr. Quinton's joyous comment in his associate's ear. "Well, thank God I did not cross-examine."

As for Mr. Thomas Kitter, he yearned like a mother to press the young man to a bosom throbbing with admiration. So the day closed in a buzz of excitement over the fall of Goliath and the triumph of the stripling David.

Next morning, as Kinloch awoke after a four hours' sleep, he received two pieces of news that caused him both gladness and regret—one that Mr. Quinton was too ill

[illegible] Old Rustic takes it for granted
come in London."

And welcome and doubly welcome he
promptly informed by telegraph. The mes
Evan sent an agent to hire a furnished W
he might entertain his guest becomingly
leader; and hastened to Palace Gardens, tc
in the throes of gout. There was nothing
loch thought, but to have the proceedings
the other would not listen to such a propo:

"What!" he cried almost angrily, "let de
terday's good impression? Not a word of t
will go on, and I will bear my torture and
as the devil and the doctors will permit m
husband my resources for the big speech.
not forget the occasion is likely to be histori

The case accordingly proceeded, Kinloc
ten Trojans, yet contriving to entertain his
his chief daily. In these visits the dominie
panied him, bringing, as Mr. Quinton said,
an atmosphere of Homer. Great was Mr. I
isfaction in the talk of old and young alike,
his surprise when the two men of business
affairs.

"And God gave it to me to help in the
intellect that divides like a keen steel instru
say to himself gazing at Evan. It was almo
could believe

present, stole away under pretence of verifying a quotation in the library; but on the way home he ventured to ask what the decision was.

"Why, nothing," replied Evan: "we were both thrawn, thanks to gout and natural obstinacy. Mr. Quinton will come to reason to-morrow morning. The idea that I should take his place is too absurd to be discussed. He must deliver the speech. He is the first orator at the Bar to-day; his influence is immense; this is perhaps the greatest occasion of his life—and in short, if the delay should be six months he will speak, or our side is dumb—and I told him so."

"I will not presume to advise," said the dominie after a moment's silence. "But I have been studying the situation a little and comparing men—an old weakness of mine—and do you know my conclusion?"

"What is it, sir?"

"Why, just this, that you ought to thank God for this particular instance of His favour."

"In thrusting a responsibility on me, for which I am not fit?"

"Precisely."

"Think what failure would mean, sir."

"Think what success would mean. I have known Evan Kinloch to be in trying circumstances, and never heard that he failed."

"Ah! sir, this is not an examination paper. Besides, the greater my success the greater the injustice to Mr. Quinton. The occasion is his, not mine. No, no, sir, he must deliver the speech, and he will deliver it, if I carry him to court on my back."

Gout and the doctors, however, held fast to their victim, and Mr. Quinton was immovable. An adjournment he affirmed for the twentieth time would ruin all by dissipating the good results obtained at such a cost and with so much skill.

"No general in his senses would think of postponing a battle," he told them, "because an old soldier happened to be *hors de combat*."

"The case is altered, sir, when the old soldier is the general himself," responded Evan.

"Tut, tut!" cried Mr. Quinton impatiently. "The best of us is not indispensable. We grow old and infirm, or err,

thus silenced, made, willy-nilly, to bear
of vindication, there was nothing for it bu
shoulders for the burden. It was appall
for a scion of the House of Atlas. But h
quail. When he protested, it was not from
but because he recoiled from the idea of
of a great opportunity. He was well awar
regarded the speech; the importance that
it, the glory that was expected to accrue fr
into the breach one's duty is to fight, simp
fight, not to reason about private feelings.

The mere preparation would have un
hausted most men of his experience; to Kir
redder heat in the furnace, a little more ste
inie, who was as faithful to him as his sha
had never till then known what mental toi

"Ay, ay," he would say, "we thought we v
side and Aberfourie. But Lord! we only pl
burgh and Oxford it was just play also. This
but God-sake take care. I did not come u
through a brain-fever."

On the eve of the momentous event Evan
Gardens to rehearse his points, his pupil anc
being of the company. In the eagerness of
menting, and confirming Mr. Quinton forgc
remembered it suddenly with a gasp and a c
enance when in his absorption the hand

gether pedestrian. Pray don't forget the wings. In really effective speeches there must be something better than detail. But there, there," he added with a smiling glance at Mr. Proudfoot, "we old fellows are too fond of teaching fish to swim."

"I came for direction and advice," said Evan.

"Well, well! my advice is to take your own course, and may Heaven aid brain and tongue, for Heaven and our friend Kitter alone know how much hangs on the issue. To what extent have you been burning the candle at both ends?"

"You will understand, sir," put in Mr. Proudfoot, "when I tell you that for two whole nights his bed has not known him."

"That," observed Mr. Quinton severely, "is extremely foolish. Well! promise to spare the candle to-night."

And the transgressor promised, Mr. Proudfoot undertaking to see that the promise should be kept.

On the morrow, long before the hour of opening, the court was thronged with an auditory made splendid by rank and intellect and jewelled beauty. Mr. Gasten laid aside the cares of Opposition to watch a more exciting game. Mr. Distoire could not attend, but he was represented by two members of his Cabinet and all his law officers; Lords and Commons jostled cheerily while commenting on the drama they had come to witness, and bishops and great dames comforted each other in a crush that was soon stifling. Mrs. Langham was there with her husband and father, and Mr. Proudfoot occupied a favoured seat. When Evan entered and took his place beside a table loaded with stacks of books, papers, and legal documents, he was startled to find Mr. Quinton waiting for him.

"Oh, yes, I have come to see the fun," said the maimed leader. "Pray remember the doctor's nursling. You never know the tenderness of flesh till you've got a gouty toe to look after. Well! for the sake of a wounded comrade —courage."

"*Sursum corda*, we will try," said Evan.

The Bar trooped in smiling and expectant, many nodding familiarly to Kinloch, and some asking him how he felt. Mr. Kitter sat in anxious colloquy with his client, who had to be assured and encouraged because of his champion's youth. Then all at once there was a rustle and flut-

justing its triple spectacles, looked dow
Mr. Kitter trembled a little in spite of
tingled in a surging turmoil of feeling; a
inie, he sat with eyes fixed on his hero, as
could really be his Evan, his little sch
pleading in this great cause before these
an assembly composed of the best in th
surely Heaven was bringing strange thing

The speaker had not proceeded five m
Quinton hastily scribbled a note in pencil
Mr. Kitter. What he wrote was, "Openi
Kinloch already made his pace, and is ab
Have no fear." Solicitor and client read tl
beamed, and nodded an acknowledgment.

Kinloch was himself, self-possessed an
scious of the arduous work ahead. Begin
wont, in that tone of familiar conversation i
of his power lay, he called the attention o
to the complicated character of the case,
gravity of the charges, and the spirit in
made. He seemed to be less arguing than
wonderful if sometimes horrible fascinat
difficulties melted like snow on the swift
tive. Nothing seemed easier, clearer, plain
cious than the story of baseless accusatio
up infamy which it was his painful duty to
lordships for condemnation. At times he

lords, I submit that in this instance the prosecution proceeds on precisely the reverse principle; and I am glad that the Attorney-General, whose countenance will, I fear, be regarded by foreign critics as giving official sanction to such a course, I say I am glad that her Majesty's Attorney-General is present to hear the statement. My lords, this is persecution, not prosecution."

A rippling sensation ran round the court, but it instantly subsided as the pellucid narrative went on. The analysis of evidence Mr. Quinton pronounced masterly, so lightly and brilliantly it was done, so unerringly the weak and rotten spots were revealed. There were many stoppages, but at each fresh start the eagerness grew as if the constantly overflowing court could not afford to miss a word. Towards the close the interest developed to a kind of fever. Braced by the demands upon him, the orator rose to an eloquence which made people accustomed to such displays unconsciously sit forward, and those who were not hold the breath in awe. Among the latter was Mr. Proudfoot, who sometimes could not tell whether he was awake or dreaming. Assuredly Heaven was bringing strange things to pass.

Counsel recalled Milton's vision of England, the "noble and puissant nation" selected by God to do battle for freedom and truth; he dwelt upon the probity of her statesmen, the "exemplars in patriotism and public virtue to the civilised world;" he pictured the British Parliament legislating for hundreds of millions of people in every quarter of the globe; he described the essential qualities of its members; and then, turning abruptly and fiercely, denounced the spirit which would asperse their good name on no better evidence than that furnished by a duped, deranged, or malignant imagination.

"Justice, my lords," he cried, with flashing eyes, "is neither lame nor blind, and England certainly will not tolerate unclean hands in her public men. If you find the accused guilty in respect to the accusations upon which they appear before you, then I charge your lordships to award the utmost penalty of the law. I for one will rejoice to see guilt tracked and punished. But if on the contrary, as I believe the evidence proves, 'the purest spring is not so free from mud' as are my clients from aught that is either discreditable or disloyal, then the verdict shall be a triumphant acquittal."

...g eyes, unable, for the first
speak a word.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH the unfeigned delight of a scho
tasks for games and frolic, Kinloch turne
ications of triumph to direct his old domi
the wonders of the metropolis. Innumera
they visited together, ransacking history f
calling the glorious dead from their gra
shrines Mr. Proudfoot lingered with a pa

"And this is where the oaken-hearted S
Dictionary and sent patronage for ever
devil," he would exclaim in threading the
of old London. Or "The myriad-min
actually went along these streets—nobod
divinity. Come, take me to Eastcheap and
and Mermaid Taverns; we must sup wit
and drink with Sir John, and hear the w
wise fools and foolish philosophers."

Many an hour was spent in Westminster
Corner or among the royal tombs.

"After life's fitful fever their majesties
dominie observed. "I notice" [illegible]

times mountains laboured and brought forth mice, and then his criticism was apt to become irreverent. Again, when he found sophistry doing duty for honesty he would ask with Figaro, "Who is being diddled here?" The eloquence of Mr. Gasten and Mr. Distoire he tasted with the critical smack of the connoisseur.

"Masters both, and popular," was his verdict. "Well!" lifting his eyebrows with a world of meaning, "I observe the House fills for some one else as quickly as for either of them."

To Evan's surprise Mr. Proudfoot evinced rather more than the rustic scholar's interest in the giddy children of luxury and folly. "Take me in hand," he said to his host, after a tentative peep or two into their native haunts. "Instruct me in the ways of fashion." And with a consistency all his own, he followed counsel in such minor matters as dress, while taking his own course in the momentous affair of manners.

It was at a notable West-end gathering that he met the vivacious lady of the silver ringlets, who getting him into a corner coyly set herself to obtain information about the Clan Kinloch.

"We hear so many versions of their history," she explained, beaming upon her captive, "each more romantic than the other, that we are really at a loss to make out which is right."

"Why, madam," returned the dominie, with an ambiguous smile, "I cannot help being of Voltaire's mind, that whoever serves his country well has no need of ancestors. But as touching the Kinlochs, I have not heard they ever turned their backs on God or the King, and you know, madam, what a temptation there sometimes is to do both."

"Ah," remarked the lady, with a flourish of her fan.

"What did they say that hyperborean bear is when he's at home?" she asked a minute later, with a disdainful bob of the head at the retreating dominie.

"I forget," answered the person questioned. "Oh—yes, I remember—a professor of something or other somewhere or other in the North."

"Not of deportment, my dear," said the old lady with a disgusted toss of the ringlets. "For the sake of Scotch society not of deportment, I hope. He quotes Voltaire. I believe he's a rabid infidel."

and withal imparting, in its glow and va
of the fullest life lived anywhere on ear
unexampled thing was excellent game
spirit. The dominie was as a naturalist in
naturalist prone to scepticism and with a
wide open. It was easy to mistake his n
grinning at his antique manners whis
Quixote come to life again, all unaware
moment passing under the scalpel. His
nice distinctions, and were refreshing b
candour.

"*Ex ungue leonem*," he would remark
"I noticed our friend the ubiquitous C
crowd to-night, brazen and admired and
What smiles and fat geese are his! T
fellow!"

A great experience came when, on the
Master of Balliol, he visited Oxford wit
Quinton. He was exceedingly curious a
he had felt the spell of its grey quadrangle
ciations from afar. About the Master he
ous; and be it said that despite the differe
liol and Burnside, between high heaven an
the rocks, the Master was curious about h
not concealed his opinion of Mr. Proudfo

The meeting was that of men a trifle unc

"I have never thought it trivial, sir," was the response, "to revere the choicest work of the Creator, a great intellect."

"But you have many brilliant scholars in Oxford."

"According to our calendar, many, very many. But, sir, it unfortunately happens that our scholars are seldom men and our men seldom scholars. The truth is we deal in extremes. One side is all for brawn; the other all for textbooks. Consequently we produce athletes and pedants in perfection. The full, round man of Plato is among our rarest productions. I need not name one of the shining exceptions. In his biography, sir, let us both hope for honourable mention."

The dominie observed that Oxford seemed not only ready but eager to do her son homage.

"Why yes, sir," said the Master of Balliol, "we all love him; he has irresistible attractions. Doubtless also some of us are shrewd enough to foresee that he will one of these days be dispensing the loaves and fishes of State patronage. *Le vrai Amphitryon est celui où l'on dine.* Oxford is not, sir, without wisdom and provident foresight in the affairs of this world, however she may shrug her shoulders about the next. By the way, have you noticed how infallibly our friend gets or makes his chance? Think of Quinton falling ill just at the right moment in that great case. I ask, sir, is there a divinity in these things? Was Napoleon right in ascribing miraculous virtues to his star?"

"One can only answer, sir, that the dice of Zeus always fall luckily," said the dominie.

Thus they talked by themselves. With others the conversation ran on high questions of statesmanship, scholarship, art, literature, culture, the influence of universities, and the mysteries of life. Greece was dominant, and presently there appeared in the foreground two great figures, Homer and Plato, whose champions immediately engaged each other with extraordinary spirit. Despite their ardour, however, the combatants never lost grace or good temper. When at last the Master of Balliol affirmed "There is nothing the human mind is capable of that is not to be found in Plato," the dominie responded blithely, "Nothing whatever, sir, except what is to be found in Homer," and the combat ended in laughter.

"You have a very nice apprehension of Homer, sir," re-

... for the pitfalls of the English n
Homer too well to raise the cloud of
darkness that most translators set up
and the poet. 'A very pretty poem, Mi
not call it Homer' applies unfortunate
renderings. Let me see the reproach
fore I die."

The dominie bade farewell to Oxford
ing elation.

"What did I once tell you, sir?" aske

"Something I did not believe at the
Proudfoot. "Well! there's no use disgu
Oxford fever—if a high pulse of pleasu
'The rose-red city half as old as time'—I
chantments. And I have grasped the
him I may truly say with her Majesty
half was not told me. I may have met be
in my day, and Homer's brain would fu
regiment of Platos; but the Master's a
him, and who would not prefer a man t

So the dominie whirled in his new
enemy of pleasure, warned him to turn
The last evening in London Evan and h
selves; for there was much to talk of,
rehearse, that none could share with the

"I have rare tales to tell when I g
Proudfoot. "Six months won't suffice

The ways of the Eternal are past finding out, and I have lived to see miracles. You mind the day we decided to make you a scholar—to give you a little Latin and a little Greek, some mathematics and a world of wise counsel. It makes me blush to think of our presumption in giving ourselves the airs of directing powers when we were but blind instruments. Did one of us dream of what has come to pass? I see the look on your face yet. 'Draw a line behind you,' said I, and the puzzled face turned up with a questioning look. Laddie, laddie, that look is with me oftener than I care to tell. Well! we've travelled a long road since then. Mr. Quinton has hinted what it all means to the purse."

"The purse, sir," replied Evan, "has more than it needs. I will tell you what I have not told any one else. Last year I paid income tax on ten thousand pounds; this year I'm afraid it'll be double."

The dominie's eyes widened.

"Godsake!" he ejaculated, "ten thousand pounds last year, and this year double! Tell me, are we in fairyland? Twenty thousand pounds a year, a duke's—a prince's revenue. One thousand, I said to myself, two at the outside—but twenty! And yet, why not?" he cried. "I tell you for the thousandth time there is not in all this world of wonders an engine half so wonderful as brain—brain with will-power driving. And there are greater things than the money. When I listened to you in the House of Commons and in the Law Courts I thanked God in my heart for all His goodness to me. And many and many a time she who is gone thanked Him too——

"Ay, many a time," he pursued after a pause. "I will tell you a little secret. A week before the end came I was passing my mother's room at dead of night. Hearing her voice and thinking she might be in need of something, I opened the door as softly as a cat treads and looked in. And there was the old body on her knees, and the first word I heard was your name. She did not know that any earthly ear heard her. What followed I cannot tell you now. Some day, if we are not asked to believe in fables, all will be known, and then Evan Kinloch will understand what he is to some of us."

Evan would have made some response, but the words stuck in his throat.

past. Yes, I'll go home. Meanwhil
favour to ask of you, sir."

"And that is?" said the dominie.

"That you make your home at Pit
My uncle, I know, will make you welc

"He has said so," replied the dom
big heart, he has said so."

"Then for his sake and mine you will

"I own I have little heart for opening
admitted the dominie.

Once or twice in the course of con
on the point of touching some subjec
ever, he would suddenly swerve as if it
last the question came, and it was about

"I see Mr. Dudley at Westminster c
Evan. "Otherwise I know little of th
very great and very rich people. Mrs. I
money can buy, and I hear is very happ

"H'm," said the dominie, shutting hi

CHAPTER XIV

WHILE Mr. Proudfoot was still in the
wonder Evan himself [illegible]

Except the sole possession of his boy nothing yielded him such exquisite pleasure as to hear Mr. Proudfoot and Evan talking of London and Oxford, of Parliament and Law Courts and judges, and other strange and distant topics. Neil hung admiringly about his nephew, Mr. Duff's attentions were unremitting, Dr. Forbes and Mr. Sinclair were frequent visitors, and the Rev. Murdoch Macnair and Douglas were prompt with oily felicitations and assurances that political differences should never be allowed to come between friends. For their especial benefit Mr. Proudfoot retold his best stories; and he took care to whisper privately that their young friend's income was twenty thousand pounds a year. Mr. Macnair had a shock which nearly made his eyes start from his head.

"You tell me that?" he said, amazement written in every feature of his face.

"I tell you that," answered Mr. Proudfoot, "every penny of what I say," and he nodded as if he could tell more surprising things still if he cared. For months afterwards the news ran constantly in his reverence's mind.

David, who had never set eyes on a judge in his life, heard with awe of men holding, as he said, the powers of life and death. He was grieved to learn they sometimes jested and were harsh at the expense of poor people coming before them; and it wrung his heart to learn that barristers occasionally helped out a weak case by pouring ridicule on the unfortunate. He never suspected that in that same art of ridicule his son had scarce a peer.

"You would not do that, would you, Evan?" he asked pathetically, looking over his spectacles. "The Judge of all cannot be pleased with such things."

To him the law was a very terrible thing; it was inexpressibly terrible when it appeared to clash with divine precept, as for instance in the taking away of life.

"The old rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is still the principle of the law, father," Evan told him once.

"That's the old dispensation," replied David. "That's the old dispensation. Christ gave us a new one, and it forbids the spilling of blood. It is a fearful thing to take away a fellow-creature's life, even when he has killed another. God who gave it alone has the right to do that. Suppose you were a judge, Evan, and a murderer came before you, what would you do?"

bage-leaf. There David was most
where he was subject to little visita
the others wished to see his eyes s
had but to refer to his forty perches
compassed by the bulging moss-grov
of which warmed one with a feeling
Evan's early years the garden had be
of weeds; but with better times the sk
of a born gardener made it, as the
served, bloom like a little Eden amo
love with his vocation than Adam,
ment when discoursing on the pred
and caterpillars and weevils and the be
ing the pests, on the mysteries of g
soils and seasons. He beamed like a
questions (as indeed, Evan had freque
assumed something of a professorial
how fruits were modified and develop
art.

"Evolution in practice," was his so
that is the ruling law of the universe.
had nothing to say. The law of the u
big a thing for him.

There were delicious wanderings
though in these Mr. Proudfoot and Ev
for David found himself stiff and sc
climbing. Evan watched

fourie and the mysterious way in which brother and sister laid their heads together, nodding and smiling as if they held some mighty secret it would benefit the world to find out. When it was discovered that Evan was often with Mr. Macdonald, the banker and lawyer of Aberfourie, conjecture ran high. It ran yet higher when one day the conspirators were seen to go straight from the bank to a cabinet-maker's and make an elaborate examination of furniture. What were they up to? The secret came out one morning when David, sitting down to breakfast, found beside his plate a bundle of documents tied with red tape.

"What's this?" he asked, taking up the packet.

Evan cast his eye over it.

"Has a legal look," he said carelessly. "Suggests title-deeds. Have you been purchasing property, father?"

"Title-deeds—property?" repeated David, looking from one to the other of his guilty children.

At that, Jessie, who could contain herself no longer, broke into a fit of laughter.

"It's a house," she cried. "Evan has bought you a house in Aberfourie. Read, read."

Taking the packet she began to open it, and there fell out a little note. "With Evan's love," was all it contained.

"There," she said, thrusting it into her father's trembling hand. "There, what did I tell you long ago? Has he forgotten us? See," spreading out a paper which David could not read because his eyesight was blurred, "it's one of the nice new houses you have so often admired—the one nearest the river with the big garden. It's all your own, your very own."

David tried to speak but could not, and so with shining eyes and a smothered sob he marched round the table and silently embraced his son. And his son was as silent as he.

When they could trust themselves to speak Evan said: "There is one thing I particularly wish to consult you about, father. You know how much we all owe to Mr. Proudfoot. Now, he is very lonely; besides, he is getting old and tired; and it has occurred to Jessie and myself that if he consented to live with you, room could be found for him in the new house."

"It's your wish, Evan," answered David, "and that's enough. Yes, he will live with us. I will go and tell him, I will tell him at once." And partly to get a moment by him-

By the way he explained in brok
never suspected Evan's intentions ti
ally in his hand. Evan and Jessie
no sooner did the dominie spy them
fiercely threatening gestures.

"What's this I hear of you?" h
long distance off. "Buying house
ments for other people without so
I tell you this is clean ridiculous," h
to them, "perfectly ridiculous. Wh
ing of?"

"Of my sins a little, of my debts
own gratification," was the response.

They went inside, where a battl
dominie fell tooth and nail upon E
absurd, and Neil, laughing boisterou
inie. Even David was active for his
with glee, clapped her hands and spu

"Well, sir," said Evan, as a final s
time done my best to please you,
comes you won't budge a finger's b
I call that hard."

"Hard!" repeated the dominie. "
Man alive, have you any idea what
you?"

"Judging by your present conduc
Evan, laughing

People meeting them wondered what had come over Pitweem that he drove furiously, and, instead of stopping for a neighbourly crack, flourished his whip and called out incoherently in the passing.

"He gaed by wi' a stour like Jeehue's chairiot," said one. "And it couldn't be for the doctor, for the machine was fu' and they were a' weel pleased like, though the wife had a gey red face."

The gift was examined with various feelings, some demonstrative, some too deep for expression. Neil was loud in exclamations about its grandeur, and Lisspeth grew eloquent over its advantages from the housewife's point of view. But David and the dominie said little. In the first hasty examination two rooms were omitted, and no one thought of asking why. But presently Lisspeth tried a door, and, finding it locked, turned for an explanation. Evan's answer was to unlock it. Passing through they found themselves in a bedroom, large, bright, airy, and handsomely—indeed, luxuriously—furnished. Then, by a communicating door, they passed to another room beyond, and lo! this was a library, furnished with an ample writing-table and bookcases containing new editions of the dominie's favourite authors, many of them direct from the Oxford Press.

"Now, sir," said Evan, "you can begin your Homer."

A look came into the dominie's face that made all the others save Evan turn and steal from the room.

"What is this you have done?" asked the master in a choking voice.

"A little thing that gives me great pleasure, sir," replied Evan, "and I have an especial favour to ask—that you accept it for my sake. You will not say 'No.' You will not deny me this little gratification," and pulling a bank-book and a cheque-book from his pocket, he added: "You will accept these also. There is a small account in Mr. Macdonald's bank in your name; draw as you like."

He did not tell that Mr. Macdonald had instructions to send word to London when the account ran low.

"The succourer and saviour of us all," murmured the dominie, through tears which he did not attempt to check. "But this cannot be, Evan; this really must not be."

"Then you will send me back to London with a sore heart."

"I would not do that; no, not if I could help it."

ones with blithe hearts. When the p
fain have remained in the place wl
so long. For him it was castle enoug
by many joys and many griefs, the
than the former. Above all, it was fu
all at once into disquieting vividnes
them before Evan, the revolutionisin
her name. David would gladly have
out flitting, content to close his eyes
she had closed hers. It almost seemec
to move into other or finer quarters.

Neil likewise was reminiscent and
Even Lisspeth displayed an unsusp
mentality. Pitweem would not be Pi
and Jessie, and to take the dominie av
the landscape of its most conspicuou
ment was confirmed by Red Sandy a
Mr. Proudfoot himself without regr
going.

"Burnside has proved no Paradise
I came to it young, and I am leavin
turn your back on forty years of life
in the inmost part of your being. T
schoolhouse, the battered ink-staine
the blackboard, the bits of maps, th
they are poor enough, God knows, bu
my existence for twoscore years."

which made experienced mothers shake the head dubiously. And when the sports were over, and every boy and girl possessed something to render the day for ever memorable, the whole company crushed into the school, almost bursting its old walls asunder, to hear a panegyric upon the dominie. In the beginning many of the young folks laughed uproariously, the speaker was so comic, but by-and-by they sat very still, and before the end handkerchiefs were at the eyes of most of his older hearers. For Evan spoke of comings and goings, of meetings and partings, and particularly of the dominie's long work among them—which was now ended.

"Some of you," he said in a voice that had a pathetic quiver in it, "some of you may be able to reckon your debts to Mr. Proudfoot; I despair of ever being able to reckon mine. As you know, a good many teachers have in various places tried their hands on me, with doubtful results, but never such another as the master of Burnside." And fathers and mothers, furtively wiping their eyes, said indeed that was very true, for there could not be anywhere else so learned a man. They knew it; had they not often said so? They discovered also that, though another might succeed him, no one could ever fill his place.

It was expected that the dominie would make a fine speech in reply, but when Lauchie called his name, and the assembly broke into vehement cheers, he only shook his head and held his face down. As they filed out, however, he stood by the door shaking hands as they passed—out of his life. David, Jessie, Neil, Lisspeth, Red Sandy, Mr. Sinclair, and Lauchie remained after the others; but at length they also went, and Mr. Proudfoot and Evan were alone. For a minute the dominie stood looking round the deserted room.

"Well! we've reached the end," he said huskily. "It's all over. The lessons have all been learned and repeated, and my scholars are gone—for ever."

He walked to the upper end of the room, then back again. "Come and sit down."

And they sat down in the precise spot where they had sat once before, on the eve of Evan's departure for Edinburgh. Silently they looked out on the familiar scene. How much had come and gone since that far-off evening! The face of nature was unchanged, but wonder-working Time had been

CHAPTER XV

FROM the peace of Pitweem, and the st
serve of Aberfourie, Evan passed at a bo
excitements of a general election. Th
jinks and midnight sensations at Wes
votes of censure to add piquancy. Dete
hydra at a blow, Mr. Distoire one fine
to the country" without warning, and
available was drawn for war. Wise me
the unmistakable. When the new Ho
Distoire found the sheep in the place o
on the left-hand side. He was not the n
fate. "Another time," he said, smiling cy
down to harass the Government.

In bringing about the change of posit
more effective service than the Member
who not only increased his own major
culean aid to his friends, and particular
whose seat was a trifle shaky. When, h
rewards he held aloof. In allotting off
very kind to him. More practically on

he was besieged by a host sufficient to gobble up fifty times his supply of provender.

"I do not wish to embarrass him," Kinloch explained privately. "He has only one or two places in his gift that I would accept, and these he durst not give to outsiders." So instead of office Mr. Kinloch took silk, and briefs flowed faster than he could well deal with them.

True to his purpose Mr. Distoire gave the Government no rest. Night and day he was at them, and as the vulnerable spots were many the Opposition had rare sport. During that doubtful time, as critics both within and without remarked, no man in the House took so long a stride forward as Mr. Kinloch. A faculty of incalculable value to governments he displayed in unique perfection—power of debate coupled with an ardent but faultlessly disciplined temper. It was observed that he had two manners, the forensic and the House of Commons; and that he passed from one to the other at will, a transition of which few lawyers in any age have shown themselves capable. That was the rock on which his friend Quinton, and other able men, split. As he never hit in malice nor took an unfair advantage, he was a prime favourite with the House. The House, in fact, was beginning to be proud of him, and the enthusiasm of the Commons properly roused knows no bounds.

An unstable Administration came like its predecessor to a sudden end. But luckier than his rival, Mr. Gasten caught the tide at the flood, and came home triumphantly on the crest of a great wave, a thumping majority. When the campaign was over, and the Premier was once more distributing favours, one evening Evan called at Palace Gardens to discuss the situation. Mr. Quinton's sharp eye detected in his manner something unusual, an element it might be of suppressed excitement; and the thought of disappointed ambition came naturally. The talk turned at once to legal appointments and the chances of this man and that in the redistribution. It appeared the old occupants would slip back into all the big offices.

"And yet," said Mr. Quinton, very deliberately, "in these races we must never allow ourselves to forget the dark horse."

"And whom would you name the dark horse in this race, sir?"

"I think," replied Mr. Quinton, looking closely at his friend, "I think I should name him Evan Kinloch."

Thereupon Evan put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a letter marked "confidential" on the outside.

"Read that," he said quietly.

Taking the letter Mr. Quinton glanced at the heading and the signature; then, hardly able to breathe for excitement, read as follows:—

"DOWNING STREET, *Tuesday.*

"DEAR MR. KINLOCH,—I have recommended you to the Queen for the office of Solicitor-General, and trust to hear as early as convenient that acceptance is compatible with your views and engagements.—With cordial esteem, obediently and faithfully, E. GASTEN."

Mr. Quinton made a spring at his friend, catching and wringing his hand with a grip that nearly made blood spout from the finger-tips.

"My dear fellow," he cried, every fibre in his body dancing with delight, "how can I congratulate you? That's handsome of Gasten, very handsome, though of course it's only your due and what we all knew was coming. No need to talk of good wishes. Have you let the folks at home know?"

"I came straight to you," was the answer. "You are the only one to whom I have told the news."

"Good God, how monstrously unkind of you!" rejoined Mr. Quinton, opening the door. "Come." And they made for the nearest telegraph office. There in breathless haste the message was written, Evan standing by as if he were not concerned in the matter.

"KINLOCH, Tayside, Aberfourie.—In the new Government Solicitor-General's name is Evan Kinloch. Tell Mr. Proudfoot and all friends. Heartiest congratulations.—QUINTON."

"There will be no delay in sending that, I hope," he said, in handing in the form.

"It will go at once, sir," answered the girl, lifting her head when she had read it and glancing at the two. On the younger her eye lingered, for his face seemed to tell tales.

"That will be a bomb," said Mr. Quinton, turning back

to his companion. "That will be the biggest bomb that ever fell on Aberfourie.

He was not mistaken. Half-an-hour later David walked into the dominie's study choking and speechless, and laid the flimsy on his desk, Jessie watching with swimming eyes behind. When he read it Mr. Proudfoot leaped from his chair with a hoarse cry that might have signified unbearable pain or excessive joy.

"Solicitor-General of England! a great law officer of the Crown! Lord, how adorable are Thy works! Sir Evan Kinloch, her Majesty's Solicitor-General. I must tell Sinclair, and Dr. Forbes, and Macnair: I must tell everybody." And with that he rushed from the room, leaving David and Jessie to get over the shock of joy as best they might.

Had the bellman been on the spot to give the thing wind it could not have flown faster. All Aberfourie had the news as sauce for supper; and when darkness fell there was such a blaze of tar barrels on the hill above the playground of Aberfourie Academy that the countryside flocked in to see if the town were on fire. Lauchie Duff heard of the jubilation next day and cursed his luck in being at the other end of the parish.

"And me and him sic friends," said Lauchie in disgust. "Just to think I wasna there for the ploy." Mr. Duff might have added "and for the chances of meat and drink."

No one had expected a change of law officers at that moment. But a Prime Minister must likewise be a good general, and in manœuvering to get his best men into action cannot help giving surprises. Wherefore it came to pass that acting upon delicate hints the old Chancellor all at once made up his mind to retire with an earldom, and the Attorney-General, a safe and not over-active gentleman of threescore and a family connection, carried his dignities to the Woolsack. Thus way was expressly made for Kinloch, because even governments cannot afford to neglect talent. The art of using men is the secret of political leadership.

Since Adam delved and Eve span no man ever stepped over the heads of his fellows without touching some eyes to a green tinge and some tongues to an edge of poison. Kinloch had to sustain the "complimental assaults" of cabals; but in his evil hour of prosperity his comrades of the Bar did not forsake him. On the contrary, they were exuberant in their felicitations; clapped him on the back, told

...as the second bomb that made th
stand still.

In office he amazed certain officials
and his evident expectation that they
taste. Though he was urbanity incar
terror of those whose duties brought
tion with him when there was need o
everything, remembered everything,
and believed in high pressure. Mor
bishop of Canterbury has happily ca
delegation came to him intuitively. In
discovered he understood administrat
they understood it themselves. It was
Yet he was not six months in office w
with pride and swore by his shadow.

CHAPTER XVI

ALL the world's a stage, and the bla
British House of Commons. Perhaps
this realm of magic, rather than his
or scholarship (though the official *cc*
value) that brought the Solicitor-Ge
petition to allow him[illegible]

sessing all the advantages of vast territorial and political influence. But even dukes cannot snuff out the rising sun. On the great day her Majesty's Solicitor-General was elected by an overwhelming majority, a circumstance which came near being the death of Mr. Proudfoot.

"To think," he sobbed, "that I have lived to see this! A scholar of mine Lord Rector of my old university. God forgive my sins of idolatry. David, you'll go up with me to hear the Lord Rector's address?"

"Please God, I will," said David.

"And I'll go, too," cried Jessie. "I want to see Evan in his robes."

Mr. Sinclair declared he also would go, and even Dr. Macnair was not sure that he might not be in Edinburgh about the right time.

David looked forward to that journey as he had never before looked forward to any journey. Often in the gloaming he would draw the dominie into talk about it, and a hundred times he made Mr. Proudfoot describe the proceedings as they might be expected to take place. He dwelt on the details when alone, thrilling over the sight, so easily conjured up, of his boy receiving honours at the hands of men who were themselves honoured. Ah! the realisation of that vision would be the crowning joy of life. In the garden, among his flowers and bushes, when the evening sun gleamed through gaps in the hills, his imagination was busy with the gorgeous city; and at dead of night he dreamed, with open eyes, of unspeakable scenes in which Evan was always the chief figure. Hitherto Evan had mostly lived in another world, a world far, far away. Oxford seemed as remote as Jupiter; Parliament and the Law Courts remained dim, in spite of all efforts to picture them; the Solicitor-Generalship was something which the simple mind could not grasp. But here—here was his boy coming back close to him.

"I think I see Evan before all the grand people in Edinburgh," he said to Jessie again and again. "I wonder what he'll say to them? I am sure I couldn't say anything."

"You and I, father, would sing the song of mum, I'm thinking," Jessie would laugh.

Elaborate preparations were made for the journey; but when they were nearly complete, David rose one morning, after a sleepless night, complaining of feeling shivery and

"Maybe I was too anxious to s
when they came to say good-bye.
much of the things of this world. B
good laddie, for all his boyish faults.'

"Ay," put in the dominie, "he's b
and we'll not remember his boyish fa

"I would like to see him among t
David wistfully. "I have never seer
home; but God's will be done. O
Jessie; she would like so much to se
him how it is, and he'll understand;
at that."

He paused an instant to take brea

"You'll bring him back with you, t
what may happen. Life is short and
would like to see him once again. I
up in London there, but he'll spare
see us. Good-bye." He held out a
think of it all, lying here."

Dr. Forbes saw them into the trai

"I would bring Sir Evan as quickly
with a grave face.

The dominie turned on him angrily

"What is that you say?" he demar
to tell us there is danger?"

"I only say bring Sir Evan as qui
peated the doctor. "Give him ——"

I think I hear them cheering. It'll be a fine, fine sight; you'd like to be there, Jessie; but Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Sinclair will tell us everything," and he smiled in a way that Jessie never forgot.

Could he actually have beheld the scene on which his imagination dwelt so fondly he might well have doubted his senses. One who was there, and fancied he knew what to expect, at times felt he had been spirited entirely out of the land of realities. When in the tumult of enthusiasm Mr. Proudfoot looked forth upon the sea of ardent faces, then at the array of gowned erudition about him on the platform, and tried to realise what it all meant, there were moments in which he could not help suspecting he was the sport of delusions. He sat beside his old friend and rival, the Professor of Humanity, and many a nod and look and significant whisper the two exchanged.

Antics and irreverent mirth lightened the tedium of preliminaries. Famous recipients of degrees had their merits enumerated in a din of derisive criticism. Not even the ogres of the Senatus Academicus were sacred. For on that day, as a wit remarked, discipline was in a state of suspended animation.

"Impatient for the protagonist," said the Professor of Humanity in the dominie's ear; and nodding emphatically Mr. Proudfoot glanced at Evan sitting modestly, a mere boy, among the venerable pundits.

When a pale young man in the gown of a Master of Arts rose and introduced "Sir Evan Kinloch, her Majesty's Solicitor-General, and one of the most distinguished sons of the university," and the Principal, bowing elaborately, saluted him as Lord Rector, the students leaped upon their seats, and it seemed the roof was cracking with the pealing cheers. And as the Lord Rector stepped forward, tugging slightly at his gold-laced robe, the thronged house burst into an ovation that was a prolonged roll of thunder with the piercing treble note to drive the welcome home. The dominie, watching with the gaze of sheer fascination, noticed that the Rector smiled as he waited for the tornado to exhaust itself. The Rector in fact was regarding the demonstration partly in amusement, partly in pity. He knew these ingenuous enthusiasts so well; had he not been one of them himself but a year or two before? They were at once so learned and so ignorant; they knew so much of the world

of books and so little of the world of men! God help some of them when they came to be caught between the upper and the nether millstone.

At length they signified it was their pleasure to listen; and he began to talk to them of "Yesterday and To-day," a subject, as he laughingly affirmed, high enough and deep enough, old enough and new enough, to embrace man and most of his interests on this globe. In five minutes he was on confidential terms with his audience: in fifteen the spell had set senses on the strain lest a word should be lost.

He took them back to the dim dawn of things, startling the imagination as it were with pictures of Leviathan and the first sunrise that gleamed upon chaos. The shiver of that chill grey morning time, the birthtime of dragons, of myths and superstitions, was upon the air. There followed an awesome account of the interminable series of the generations rushing pell-mell into eternity, while the world came spinning "down the ringing grooves of change." The vision of a poet inspired by scientific fact, it charmed levity and made sage heads nod in assent. He referred to the transitoriness and continuity of human society—fleeting as shadows, stable as the hills—quoting a noble passage from Burke on the Divine Order. A stupendous wisdom has so moulded together "the great mysterious corporations of the human race that the whole at one time is never old or middle-aged or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay full of renovation and progression." He glanced in the passing at Egypt, at Palestine, at Greece, at Rome, asking what these bequeathed us, and answering with the one word "Civilisation."

That was Yesterday. Taking up To-day, he dwelt upon the glorious heritage of their country and the duties it imposed. He spoke of national and personal ideals, touching upon success and failure, the heaven and hell of the modern world. Here he specially stirred the hearts of his audience. He was himself success incarnate, and ambition listened breathlessly for the invaluable secret. But it seemed all he had to give was a warning. "I did not come here," he told them, "to preach any sordid gospel of success. Ask your own souls, and they will reply in language you will heed if you are wise, that there are failures nobler far than any worldly success, and successes that are ignoble failures. You tell

me that these are truisms, commonplaces. I can but ar my brilliant friends of the Dialetic that the foundation the world are laid on the commonplace. Nature thriv by stock plans." A little later he owned it is natural t man to love success. "It is a magical word, implying untold, unimagined felicities. How are we to attain this state of bliss?" he asked, and every ear was craned. "What receipt have worldly philosophers given us? So far as I know, one and one only—a determination not to fail. The rule is the essence of simplicity until one comes to apply it —then it is marvellous how many lions suddenly spring up in the way. To proceed undismayed is the distinction of your Alexanders and Napoleons. But," he added after a little pause, "when ambition pricks to gigantic things you will always ask yourselves whether it is really worth while winning an empire to die miserably on an island in the Atlantic."

As for means to compass the end, there was the significant hint that if the mountain did not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet would do well to go to the mountain. Only it would be prudent to mind one's feet in the going. "*Lubrici sunt fortunæ gressus*," said the orator. "The wise err if the footsteps of fortune are not indeed the slipperiest of all slippery things."

On the pivot of the proverb he swung to scholarship, dwelling on its uses, its high and noble delights, till the dominie nudged the Professor of Humanity with a "Listen, listen to that," and the Professor of Humanity answered in an excited whisper, "I'm listening—superb! The classroom has borne fruit." "The brain has borne fruit," rejoined the dominie. "Ay," assented the Professor absently, "precisely that."

The peroration was on the brotherhood of man, and it brought half the audience unconsciously to their feet. It was clinched with the sentiment of Burns delivered in a tension that was electric.

"Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree and a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that.
That man to man the warld o'er
Shall brothers be and a' that."

He sat down in a tempest of enthusiasm, such a tempest as only students frenzied with admiration can produce. While the din raged the great and learned crowded about the Lord Rector. "A perfect triumph," they shouted in his ear; but the best tribute rendered there was the silent hand-grip of the dominie.

CHAPTER XVII

On the day of installation a Lord Rector is everybody's property. Consequently it was late when Kinloch, escaping from the tumultuous fervours of his friends, accompanied Mr. Proudfoot and Mr. Sinclair to their hotel. On entering the dominie was handed a telegram which he read with a troubled face. It was from Dr. Forbes, and contained but two words: "Come quickly."

"I am afraid your father is no better," he said, handing the message to Evan. "But we cannot get to Aberfourie to-night."

"We'll get as near it as possible, sir," returned Evan. "My engagements must be cancelled at once. Please God, I shall see my father alive. Mr. Sinclair and yourself will perhaps help me to get ready."

They were off within an hour, and a little after midnight they reached Perth. The Highland train did not start till half-past five, and there were still forty miles before them. What was to be done? A hasty calculation showed that by hiring fast horses and changing at frequent stages three hours could be saved, three precious hours in what, as the dominie was forced to own, might prove to be a race with death. That was enough. In half-an-hour they were off again, startling the sleepy watchmen as they clattered into the blackness of the great north road. Thrice horses were changed by the way, but the bleared sky was glimmering with the dawn ere the last pair, drooping and foam covered, awoke the echoes in the main street of Aberfourie.

At Tayside the travellers were admitted by Lisspeth, who greeted them in an awestruck whisper, which smote upon Evan's heart. Immediately behind her as if waiting

stood Dr. Forbes. The kindly physician's face told a tale which Evan read all too plainly, yet the natural inquiry came mechanically as their hands clasped.

"I lost my patient an hour ago, Sir Evan," answered the doctor, and there was a break in the strong voice.

Though the reply was exactly what Evan expected the Universe was suddenly darkened.

"Too late!" he said with a quivering lip. "Just an hour too late. I was hoping to see my father alive." Then noticing the evident pain of the doctor, "But the time had come. I am sure everything possible was done."

As he spoke Jessie came running downstairs, and the others turned away as brother and sister smothered their grief in an embrace. Then Jessie looked up quietly, wiping her eyes.

"Come and see father," she said simply, and led them to the hushed chamber.

David lay on a snowy bed, his thin face serene and peaceful, as if he had fallen asleep smiling. So in fact he had.

"Like a weary traveller taking sweet rest after a long journey," murmured Mr. Sinclair.

"A righteous man gone," said Mr. Proudfoot. "One that fortune's buffets and rewards has ta'en with equal thanks."

"I thank you, sir, for that," said Evan.

With an emotion that long experience of death scarcely helped him to control, the doctor described the end.

"It minded me of nothing so much," he told them, "as a little child going over happy after getting its mother's good-night kiss. A very little before the end came, when I thought he was asleep, he lifted his head suddenly and looked round as if he was expecting some one. 'What is it, David?' I asked, coming close to him. With that there stole over his face the brightest smile I think I ever saw. 'Evan's coming home from college,' he said. 'He'll be here in a little, and he's going to stay a long, long while with us.'" The doctor had to pause. "He lay down with a little sigh of happiness, the radiance fading gently away. There was just a perceptible tremor of the breath. I bent over him and found my patient gone. Never in his life did he go to sleep more sweetly. When my time comes may I have just such another look."

Mr. Proudfoot glanced at Evan, signed to the others,

a moment to read may learn that
memory of the sleepers below "by th
Jessie." The grave is peculiar in fi
flowers upon it, though they general

The funeral was reckoned the lar
Aberfourie in many years. For Da
ous in his latter days; moreover he ch
of a great and influential man. So
erously calling his virtues to mind, flo
Among those who pressed closest t
of it in the going down was Lauchie I
his fiddle, and washed, kempt, and i
suit of broadcloth, bought the dead n
He stood bare-headed, and as the sol
dust" were pronounced, he bowed hin
of the eye that was not rheum. Many
the thing was so unlike Lauchie. In
yard some one referred to his respect f

"I hae good reason," was Lauchie
good and suffeecient reason." And
got out of him. Only Jessie and hi
months together he had lived wholl
David. When this was told Evan,
was not diminished, though Jessie w
out with discretion.

"What my father began I will cc
"But I should be loth [illegible]

"I am afraid, Sir Evan, your father left no will," the lawyer announced, "though there's the house and effects and a good round sum at current account in the bank. When I spoke to him on the subject he aye put it off, saying that even if he didn't make a will those he left behind were not likely to quarrel."

"And I think he was right," returned Evan. "What's here remains here. Everything is my sister's."

"Absolutely?" asked the man of business.

"As absolutely, sir, as you and the law of Scotland can make it."

"Not every sister has such a brother, Sir Evan," observed Mr. Macdonald, making a jotting on the back of an envelope.

"Not every brother has such a sister," said Evan. "I know best how much I owe her."

"I wish, Sir Evan, all debtors had your conscience," smiled the solicitor.

"If they had, sir, your occupation and mine would be gone more completely than Othello's. We must not pray for such things."

The jest was a standing treat for Mr. Macdonald's clients for six months afterwards.

"Munna pray for such things," he would chuckle. "God! her Maijesty's Solicitor-General knows just as well's the rest o' us which side his bread's buttered on. The twinkle in his eye was worth seeing."

Deeds and money were transferred to Jessie. The dominie's account was mysteriously augmented; and between brother and sister there was an understanding that the two rooms and a chair at table were his as long as he lived to use them. Before going Evan asked how Homer progressed. Mr. Proudfoot shook his head dolefully.

"There's a long, long step between admiration and execution," he replied. "We've had a tentative bout or two; but the volatile spirit is hard to catch in the English hexameter. Tell Mr. Arnold that my respect for previous translators increases."

For company Jessie had two of her younger cousins, whose sorrow for the loss of an uncle was turned to glee over the prospect of a long town holiday. But when Neil drove them in he was the excited one of the party, for he had surprising news to tell.

"We are to haf a flitting," he announced at large. "Maybe you will mind, dominie, that Dugal has his eye this long time on Dulnanean, west by here. Well, he has got it."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the dominie.

"And I cannot say I'm glad, uncle," added Evan. "You see, I cannot go back to Pitweem any more."

A look of disappointment came into Neil's face.

"Dalnanean's a better place," he said, "and Dugal is gey and well pleased, but am not sure am not sorry too."

To Evan the links with the past were dissolving like morning mist.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHANGE, the savour of life, is the very breath of politics. The Country, grumpily smoking its pipe, became conscious of a depressing monotony. Trade, it was muttered, might be better, politicians a great deal more zealous in the interests of their masters, things in general could bear more spice and variety—in short, it was high time to call the stewards to account. Accordingly one fine night the division bell startled loiterers in the library and lobbies at Westminster, sending them scurrying to their posts. What in the name of wonder had happened? they asked. Nothing of consequence, replied the knowing ones. The Ministerial Whip had received the voting list with a confident smile, read with a changing face, glanced at a House becoming strangely electric, read again: then bowing deeply, handed the paper to the Opposition Whip, and passed rearward to the left. The dice declared Mr. Gasten out. His rival was to have another turn of the snuggeries of office, or in the sublime words of the rhetorician, to him were once more to be entrusted the destinies of this mighty empire. The Solicitor-General and his colleague therefore crossed the floor from right to left, smiling as though glad to repose for a while in the shade. When the new House assembled several familiar faces were missed, among them that of the late Member for Beltingham. Mr. Dudley puzzled his friends by not seeking re-election, and the puzzle became greater when it was found Mr. Langham was also voluntar-

ily retiring into private life. The curious asked what this could mean, and cast about for explanations. Those who were better informed suggested increasing financial responsibilities, and sometimes looked grave.

The new Government had hardly got comfortably settled when there fell a vacancy in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice. Such vacancies are often awkward for the dispensing power. No sooner was the breath out of the defunct judge than a round dozen of Mr. Distoire's supporters felt themselves glow and expand under the ermine of the judicial bench. But that great man, being happily in a position to please himself, did a characteristic thing. The new judge was selected from the opposite camp, and his name was Sir Evan Kinloch. The party, and the Chancellor, the official tool in the appointment, protested vigorously. Mr. Distoire smiled blandly. "It is so rarely in public life one is able to gratify a private wish," he said whimsically to his Chancellor, "that I know you will not raise obstacles. You will remember, of course, we must shortly have at least two more vacancies on the Bench, one in Chancery, the other in Divorce and Probate—the liveliest court in the land, I always think. These plums we'll keep to ourselves. But as a start we'll take the line of perfect impartiality. Believe me, a worse card might be played. And between ourselves, we're safer with Kinloch hanging rogues than pouncing out of ambush upon us in the House of Commons. You'll of course do your utmost to get him to accept. I think he'll be the youngest judge who ever sat on the bench of the High Court, at any rate in our time."

Discussing the remonstrance privately, Mr. Distoire remarked significantly, "It would be unpleasant for me to follow Gasten's example and press an earldom on my Lord Chancellor."

Of all men who made wide eyes over the appointment, Kinloch himself was probably most surprised. But Mr. Quinton thought it one of the best strokes of business that even the astute Distoire had ever done.

"And, to leave policy out of consideration," he added, "you are worth no less a place. The sole question is will you make the sacrifice?"

After some dubitation the sacrifice was made; and Mr. Proudfoot laid aside Homer for a whole month while he



would father say? she asked
she could almost see him trei

What her brother found st
having his old leader plead b
that his first summing up to
friend he loved above all me
lives for ever had more ironie
to burn as fire.

His new dignities were still
loch when the country was tl
British and International Cor
ruinous crash. Horror was ad
telegraph flashed that the dir
ley and his son-in-law, were a
Jail.

"My poor Florence," were
help her."

He lost not a moment in doir
soon as he knew it was to be
he went straight to Palace Gar

"This is a fearful business,"
cannot tell you how my feelin
shudder. Quinton, will you de

"Not to speak of other reasc
you wished it," replied Mr. Qu

For two months the prelimir
then, as the world expected, the
for trial [illegible]

"What in the name of Heaven is the matter?" demanded Quinton, starting up.

"My God, Quinton, an awful thing has happened," returned Kinloch, the lines of his face quivering with anguish. "I have to take the Midland Circuit. Merciful God! I am to try Dudley and Langham."

He bent forward, his face hidden in his hands, and Quinton fell back silent.

"That is a terrible stroke," said the latter presently. "A terrible stroke, to be sure. But of course you have only to intimate certain reasons why you should not take the case, and it will be assigned to another judge."

"Yes," said Kinloch, getting to his feet. "I have thought of all that, and it would be an easy way out. But I have also thought of this:—It's a complicated business. None knows better than myself, few so well, that Dudley might be involved in perfect innocence. Things may not be as black as they seem, and it would be an everlasting gladness to me to set Dudley free. Moreover, I have told myself that, come what may, no other occupant of the bench would so eagerly spy for points in the prisoners' favour. Quinton, you are defending, am I right?"

"Being what you are, absolutely right," answered Quinton.

So the time came, and Mr. Justice Kinloch went out to hold his first Assize. Beltingham was last on the list for jail delivery, and through all it was as a hideous nightmare. At the old familiar station where the private secretary had so often come and gone, the High Sheriff's carriage was waiting for him, and he rolled to the judges' quarters escorted by flunkeys and men-at-arms, a state of semi-royalty. Those about him remarked how young he was; some said he was one of the lucky ones of the earth, envying him for it; and the judge on his part, looking forth, envied the crossing-sweeper who stood aside to make way for the equipage, because the crossing-sweeper had not to try his friend.

He was taking both civil and criminal business, and the civil came first. That disposed of, there followed a notorious murder case. At the end of two days it was the young judge's duty to put on the dread cap and sentence two men to death without hope of pardon. As they passed out, one raving, the other limp with fear, it flashed upon him

what his father would have said: "It is a fearful thing to take away human life." Some minor cases came next, wretched and sordid enough, the judge felt; and then one afternoon the court crier stood up and called "The Queen against Dudley and others."

A tremor passed through the judge. He was bending over his papers as five prisoners guarded by warders filed in; but when they stood in the dock he gave one swift glance down, one flash of the dark eyes. Instantly they were raised again without sign of recognition; but he had the impression, indelible for ever, of a look at him of dumb, ghastly terror, from haggard, sunken faces—the look of the hunted and snared. He scarce knew Mr. Dudley; he could not believe that the crouching shrunken creature on the left with the abject look of appeal was the once gay Langham. Catching his breath, the judge again bent over his papers. The Attorney-General rose in a crammed and stifling court, but hot as was the air the speech of indictment made some there cold.

It was no comfort that the case was presented with studied moderation, as if the bald facts were enough for any judge and jury. To experts, indeed, that baldness was more ominous than the deadliest process of logic or the fiercest surge of rhetoric could be. Witnesses, books, mountains of documents deepened the blackness of the opening statement. With the relentlessness of trained faculties following clues, untying knots, smoothing and lighting intricacies, counsel traced the downward course; showed how one plunge, one lie, necessitated another until plunging and lying were no longer possible. Now and again as a harrowing point was made the judge would give a little start as if to interrupt or refute, and subsided with a pang. It was no longer his to plead or advocate, but to weigh and sit in judgment. Mr. Quinton was quick to seize upon aught bearing a shade of irrelevancy, and with the shadow of a reason the Bench was no less quick to sustain his protest. Once at least the ruling was as a sting in a tender place. It was when a certain document, over which a dispute had arisen, was handed to the judge for inspection. He examined it with a curious expression. It was in his own handwriting, a relic of the fatal past. "The evidence is admissible," he said quietly, handing it back.

Mr. Quinton's speech for the defence brought a gleam of

hope into the stricken faces of Dudley and Langham; and those who had often witnessed his feats in cross-examination said that in that trial he rose above himself. It might indeed well be; for he was animated not merely by the lawyer's wish to win a case, but by a passionate desire to deliver a friend. Several times he utterly confused and broke down a damaging witness, and he had the jury furtively wiping their eyes. Once or twice also the judge did a little cross-examination for himself. Throughout it was pitiable to watch the fluctuating expressions of hope and despair in the countenances of the prisoners—the momentary gleam as they clutched at a straw, and their ghastly horror when it went down with them. A week the trial lasted in spite of prolonged sittings. People flocked from far and near as to some poignant drama, some exquisitely harrowing spectacle, awaiting the end with a kind of gloating expectation.

At last prosecution and defence had done their worst and best, and the judge began to sum up, the audience settling itself with bated breath for the climax. He had had many a trying task set him in his time; but never one like that. Yet there was no sign of the fiery rush and recoil of feeling as he weighed, sifted, analysed the evidence item by item, progressing unfalteringly through thicket and labyrinth, a very fate in the sureness of his advance. Turned sideways, and leaning lightly on his right arm, which was stretched across a pile of papers, he spoke quietly to the jury—quietly, and with the heart-chilling voice of doom. Laymen thrilled coldly as they listened; even grey-haired barristers, hardened in such experiences, felt a strange gripping in the throat.

He picked his words as if feeling their awful power; and indeed, never before had speech weighed him down with such a fearful sense of responsibility. Not a sentence, not a syllable escaped him that did not arise directly and inevitably out of the evidence. He would have split hairs, if by so doing he could get at the naked truth, and convey unprejudiced impressions to the jury. He implored them to consider their verdict with perfect impartiality. "Much has been written on the matters brought before you," he told them; "but all you have read or heard outside you will dismiss from your minds as if it had never been. If on any point you have the smallest doubt, the prisoners are entitled to the benefit of it."

The jury retired and the prisoners were removed, but in an hour they were all in their places again, the jury nervous and downcast, the prisoners with an agonised look of suspense, an appeal to hasten the tragedy. As the clerk put the question "Guilty, or not guilty?" every man and woman there held the breath for the reply. And when in the death-like stillness there sounded as from an archangel's trumpet the dread word "Guilty," there rose a mighty sough as if the entire audience gasped in pain. Before it died the building rang with a piercing scream, a woman's scream, which pealed and sank and pealed again, breaking off at last into a gurgling cry of despair. Instead of looking towards the gallery whence it came the judge bowed low, so that his face was hidden, for even in its note of anguish he knew that voice.

There were further questions and answers relating to the several prisoners, but they seemed to mean nothing; only those officially concerned heard them. For all eyes were on the staggering men in the dock, all hearts full to choking of horror and pity.

In a constrained and quivering voice the judge thanked the jury for their attention to a painful and intricate case, intimating his complete concurrence in their verdict. They should be exempt from similar service for five years. Then he stated that the Court was adjourned until next morning, and the tottering prisoners were helped from the dock.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT evening Mr. Justice Kinloch dined alone and ate nothing, a fact which greatly disturbed a very faithful valet. A single glass of wine he drank when the untouched dishes were removed, and fell to thinking. He could not tell how long he had sat in a black reverie when it was announced that three ladies wished to see him. Who were they? It was impossible to find out. They would neither give their names nor take denial, and they were exceedingly strange in manner. The judge's heart sank; but they were admitted —rather, they admitted themselves, following the valet

from sheer inability to wait. When the first entered Kinloch's head swam, and he could but gasp "Mrs. Langham," and then "Mrs. Dudley." The third, a stranger, was instinctively accepted as maid or attendant.

The door closed and they stood speechless, searching his face with eyes that seemed to burn him through. He felt giddy; something clutched at his heart as if tearing it by the roots. Yet his first act was to bow mechanically and beg them to be seated, himself remaining on his feet. They sat down, but were instantly up again, that fearful questioning gaze more piercing than before. Mrs. Dudley was the first to find utterance.

"To-morrow sentence will be passed," she panted. "Oh, Sir Evan, what is it to be?'

She took a step nearer—she, whose high line of life Evan Kinloch was never to touch, her hands out imploringly, her face desperate with entreaty.

"Do not accuse me of harshness," he managed to get out. "But—but I cannot discuss that."

"Cannot discuss it," she moaned, reeling back. "My God, my God, have pity upon me!"

Though gulping dry sobs herself, Florence took her mother in her arms soothingly, as one takes a hurt child.

"Mother, dear," she said, with a self-command that was wonderful, "the good God will both pity and help. Do not blame Sir Evan. He will be merciful: I know he will. You will, will you not?" she asked, turning to him with the old vehemence.

He looked at her dumbly, as if the question did not concern him at all. He was thinking how changed she was and yet how beautiful; what he would give to be able to help her, to take her hand and say, "Ask on, I will do whatever you wish." And she, misconstruing his silence, cried out with greater urgency, "Oh! you will not be harder than you must. That was all we came to ask. Forgive us for coming; perhaps we did wrong. But we were beside ourselves—we are only women. Oh! how horrible is ruin! ruin and disgrace. But we will not talk of that. My poor mother thought you would remember that father was once unkind to you."

"She does me wrong," said the judge.

"You hear, mother, you hear? I knew it; I said it would be blotted out. You will be generous: you will be true to

yourself, true to what I know you to be. Remember the poor suppliant's speech you once taught me—that nothing that belongs to great ones, the king's crown, the—my mind has no room for memory—but there's something about the judge's robe not sitting on him with half so good a grace as mercy. You used to teach me the speech."

"And remember," burst in Mrs. Dudley frantically, "that there is a bar at which even judges must stand. As you hope for mercy be merciful."

"Peace, mother, peace," said Florence gently, soothing again. "You do Sir Evan an injustice in thinking he needs to be reminded of that. We will go now," she went on, turning such a look on Evan as he should never forget were he to live to be a thousand. "It was good of you to see us; yes, very good. I shall perhaps sleep a little to-night. Come, mother. There, let me draw down your veil. Dear heart, how white your face is! Courage, and come away."

The three black figures passed from the room. But scarcely had the door closed behind them when it opened again, and Florence, running back like a thing distracted, threw herself at the judge's feet.

"Oh! Evan," she cried, clasping his knees with shuddering arms and looking up with a face that might have melted the very angel of doom, "for the sake of long ago, for my sake, for the sake of my innocent baby girl, have pity; have pity on my father and husband. God in heaven will reward you for kindness to one driven out of her wits. Evan, Evan! have mercy."

He took her right hand and lifted her, turning as he did so to the maid who had also come back.

"Take her away," he said hoarsely. "Take her away." Then in the maid's ear, "And for God's sake keep her out of court to-morrow."

The valet gently interfered; the door closed once more, and the judge sank into a chair, the dews of Gethsemane on his brow. "What have I done that this thing should come upon me?" he groaned. "Florence, for whom I would give my soul, coming to me on such an errand, and sent away so. Father in heaven, give me strength lest these things unman me altogether!"

Presently he arose and went out into the night, if possible to cool his beating head, telling the valet it was uncertain when he should return. The gas lamps glimmered mistily

in the familiar streets as he took his way at random down one thoroughfare and up another, blind to the people he passed. Surely, surely these were not the old ways he used to tread long ago. Then Mrs. Dudley ruled Beltingham, and Florence was full of laughter. Now—with a cold shock he found himself fronting the jail and the courthouse; the courthouse raised by Dudley's energy for his own punishment; the jail in which he lay.

Under a species of fascination which he was powerless to resist the judge walked round the jail, picturing the scenes inside, and wondering which were the most miserable, the prisoners or some who went free. Thrice he did the circuit unrecognised; in the fourth round a police inspector saluted, and he turned in another direction. By chance he went outward from the centre of the city, walking like one in desperate haste. In a quiet suburban street he drew up at the sound of a voice singing; a Scotch voice, plaintive and weird in that English place, wailing with inimitable pathos the ballad of "The Four Maries."

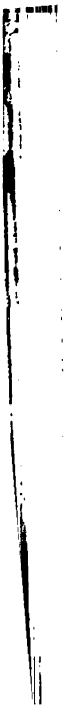
"Oh, little did my mither think,
The day she cradled me,
That I should dee sae far frae hame,
Or hang on the gallows-tree.

"But it's little care I for nameless grave,
If I've hopes for eternity.
So I'll pray that the faith o' the deein thief
May be granted through grace unto me."

He swung on his heel and strode back, the wail repeating itself poignantly in his ear, till all at once it was drowned by the crashing of other strains, the strains of "Dies Iræ." Stopping as if petrified, he recognised in the dim light the looming contour of a Roman Catholic cathedral in which he had more than once listened to a great Cardinal preaching. The words of that stern Judgment hymn, heard with transports of awe in the days of Continental tutorship, came back to him, surging and resounding in the roar and crash of the mighty organ.

"Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvet sæclum in favilla."

It seemed the very Judgment Day had come with its thunders and its vengeance; and throughout the hours of darkness the terrific cadence kept throbbing in his head.



tne prisoners were put in the doc
first time he looked straight at
was exceedingly pale; but the
eyes seemed the more penetratin
In the momentary pause a noise
swelled into a rustle like the win
fell suddenly, leaving a dead silei
of the judge broke resonantly on
dience trembled eerily. Dudley, w
between shoulders, as if the physic
and eyes fast on the ground, starte
name, turned a white drawn count
then, seeming to shrink togethei
again. The others durst not so mu

The judge was mercifully brief.
face he could hardly trust himself
worlds he would not play the homil
a dagger.

"Leonard Dudley," he said, addr
and Dudley glanced up again
"Leonard Dudley, after a long an
been found guilty of flagrant crin
think the prosecution has been cc
and a humanity that do honour t
extraordinary power of your coun
dwell. All that skill, zeal, vigilan
knowledge could do her

have risen to heaven demanding vengeance. The law recognises no principle of vengeance. Thank God, that last and most awful attribute of justice a higher Power reserves to itself. But the ministers of the law have a duty to perform to their country and their fellow-men, and they should deserve execration were they to deviate from it by so much as a hair's breadth."

Once more Dudley looked up; his lips moved as if to say something, but no words came, and his eyes dropped. Those who were near could see the sweat breaking on his forehead.

"It is necessary," the judge pursued. "It is necessary that this great realm should be preserved from the corruption which unjust dealing and financial gambling tend to bring upon it, that the weak should be protected from the depredations of the strong, that men forsaking the paths of integrity and thinking only of selfish or guilty ends should be prevented from surrendering themselves altogether to the spirit of beasts of prey. I am anxious to avoid anything that would add needlessly to the misery of your position. I am not deputed to deliver lectures on morality. But it devolves upon me to point out how the law has been transgressed—transgressed, I regret to say, with intent and motive that were unquestionably criminal. You, Leonard Dudley, have been the chief architect in rearing the fabric which, if not founded and built on fraud, was long supported by fraud. I accept implicitly your counsel's statement that you began with perfect purity of motive. I am willing to believe in the absolute integrity of your intentions in the beginning. There is also good reason to suppose that for a time at least after the tide turned you did not realise whither the affairs you were thought to control were drifting. Yet further, I believe that on realising the perils which threatened a tottering concern your efforts to hide the truth by the paying of dividends which were never earned, by the making of entries and the issuing of reports which are proved to be false, I say I believe such efforts originated in the idea that you could retrieve what had been lost. Unfortunately for yourself and for others you miscalculated. A series of what I am forced to describe as deliberate and preconcerted frauds followed. To the planning and accomplishing of those frauds your unique knowledge and great abilities were prostituted. I am satisfied it was your brain that conceived, if not actually your hand that executed, the principal



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"Fourteen years, my lord?
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CHAPTER

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received notice that, before return
Kinloch meant to speak

Dudley had already passed through the ordeal of the bath, and was cropped and in convict dress, a change which appeared to cover the whole man with crime. They had not been alone together since that night at Granvorlich Lodge when the rejected secretary went forth in the blackness and the waste, and things unutterable had come to pass in the interval. Despite his position, Dudley was the cooler of the two. Fate had struck a cruel blow, but the first agony was over, leaving the calm of partial insensibility, while the other still suffered exquisitely in every nerve and feeling. At the nadir of human fortune there comes an apathy which, having almost the virtue of strength, enables the victim in some measure to take an impersonal view of his miseries. Fortified by this bluntness or exhaustion of feeling, the old Dudley rose by degrees out of the convict ruin, a veritable phœnix in the tragic sordidness of a jail.

"I was not aware," he said, straightening his broken form, "I was not aware I was to have the honour of this visit."

Kinloch's fingers entwined and wrung as in a spasm of pain.

"My God," he returned, raising his clasped hands and unconsciously taking a step forward, "why have you made me do this? Why did you not ask me to cut out my living heart instead?"

A black shadow swept over Dudley's face, a sudden fire glowed in his eyes, the slaty cheek grew livid; the whole aspect had horrible suggestions of the serpent.

"Yes," he said, the tingling bitterness of hate in his low voice, "yes, you have done it. I suppose you think we are quits at last. I hope you are satisfied. You ought to be. This must be a more emphatic triumph than even you dared to expect. I have always heard that revenge is sweet; let me congratulate you on the fulness of yours."

"For Heaven's sake do not talk like that," entreated Kinloch. "I did not come here thinking of revenge."

"Ah," returned the other, "it is generous of you not to gloat. The temptation must be very great. But being gratified to the uttermost, what need to waste words about revenge? The chief thing in this life is to get one's desires accomplished. You were born to be successful."

"You do me a monstrous wrong," said Kinloch passionately. "I came here to assure you——"

Dudley interrupted with an ironical laugh. "Of your

continued regard," he retorted. "You will pardon me if I hardly know how to acknowledge such distinguished consideration."

"I beg of you to lay irony and wilful misconception aside," put in Kinloch earnestly. "Believe me, it was not to provoke such things I came."

"Then, sir, I am totally at a loss to account for your visit," was the response. "My judges teach me to search for motive in action. Intentions as well as deeds are to be taken into account. But we need not quibble; still less need we stand on ceremony. You have done your utmost. I defy you—mark me well, I defy you—to do more than you have done. You would have given me a life sentence if the law which you administer so scrupulously had not set a limit to your zeal. Blind justice was never better served."

Kinloch made a gesture as if to protest, but Dudley went on, his voice vibrating more and more with suppressed passion.

"You have been at immense pains to proclaim my guilt to the world. To-morrow morning everybody will know what a monster of wickedness I have been, and how Mr. Justice Kinloch reprobates dishonesty. Can they make out the real state of affairs, do you think? Will they understand that this is a little game between you and me, and that you have won? I refused you my daughter, and you send me to pick oakum. That's tit for tat with a vengeance. Will people guess these things?"

"If they insinuated any such thing I would tell them promptly it was a lie," said Kinloch.

"And no doubt they would believe. Who would doubt the word of a judge? Yours is a great victory, sir. When I said you were destined for great things I never suspected how good a prophet I was. Are you not sorry that death will rob you of your victim? You see, he grows old. Do you not regret you cannot keep him young in order to see him suffer? That were a refinement of revenge worthy of your greatness."

"I know the fearful bitterness which prompts such words," returned Kinloch. "But I would give my right hand this minute that this had never happened. I would, I would. It may be vain to tell you that, but it is true."

He spoke with a sob in his voice, but the other was only roused to direr hate.

"Do you think I am to be soothed by the syrup of soft words?" he demanded. "I crack my thumb in your face and tell you it is all in vain. I had once humane thoughts of you, but you have proved how grossly I was mistaken. I do not know where my wits were that I did not leave you as I found you. But I am not the first fool who cut a rod for his own back."

"You have cut a rod for mine," replied the judge, the anguish of his voice giving acute confirmation to his words. "I do not think I have suffered least."

"You suffered!" cried Dudley, the fire leaping from his eyes. "You suffered! Have you been seized, stripped, dragged forth a spectacle for gloating eyes, and broken on a wheel? Have you lost position, fortune, good name? Have you been forsaken? Has every kindness been forgotten and every evil remembered against you? Worst of all, have you witnessed the ruin, absolute and irretrievable, of those you should shield with your very life? If you have, talk to me of suffering."

"Then I may well talk of it," said Kinloch, "for I have witnessed the ruin of those whom I would give my life to save."

For half a second the other looked at him in incredulous silence.

"Then upon my soul you are a most miserable wretch," came the rejoinder. "But bah! lawyers' tongues are trained to say anything. Do you know I was genuinely glad when I saw you climbing the ladder so fast? I said you deserved it all; I think I even did something to help—and this is my reward."

He turned hotly and stumbled against the bed. The accident was trivial, but it sufficed to cause the explosion that was imminent from the first.

"Sir," he said, recovering himself sharply. "You see I am denied the accommodation necessary for distinguished visitors like yourself. If you are done with me have the goodness to go. This morning you denied me a word; now I value your room more than your company! Out—out! Be satisfied with your revenge—and go."

The jailer hearing the angry voice and fearing violence to the visitor, reappeared keys in hand. The judge had not said a word of what lay in his heart, and there was no hope of saying it now. He meant, incongruous as it appeared,

he meant by some means or other, arising probably out of the occasion, to express sympathy, to assure his old patron, hard as it would be to carry conviction, that what was done had been done in a terrible bitterness of sorrow, and that in spite of all that had come and gone the past was remembered gratefully. This and much more, some of it concerning Florence, he had meant to say, and he was hounded off without a chance to utter a syllable of it, scorned like one who had taken a pitiful revenge. He had intended also to see Langham. But why subject himself and others to bootless torture? So he went out with a heavy step, and the jailer locked up the prisoner, the sharp click of the bolts resounding through the corridor. The governor, who was waiting and had heard a strident note from the cell, blandly hoped the convict had not been insolent.

"If he were," answered the judge, "you would not remember it against him." With that he passed along other corridors and through iron clamped doors into the blank street, a dull pain at his heart.

Next day the Sheriff saw him off in state. As he was stepping into the saloon carriage at the station he chanced to glance to the rear of the train and caught a glimpse of some convicts being huddled into a third-class compartment. Among them he recognised Dudley and Langham.

CHAPTER XXII

As soon as possible after reaching London, Kinloch wrote a letter which, for various reasons pertinent to this history, may here be given in full.

"HARLEY STREET, W.

"MY DEAR QUINTON,—I seize the first quiet moment since my return to town to tell you that I am no longer a judge. Last evening I saw the Lord Chancellor, and by this time he has my formal resignation. He argued warmly against my decision, was good enough to say he had read every word of the summing up in the case which has cost us all so much, added things that need not be repeated, and urged me to reconsider. But I have had enough of judging. I am

acutely sensible of the distinction of being one of her Majesty's judges; and under happier circumstances I should perhaps be able to show a better appreciation. As it is the honour has been crushing. In this strange and complex, this composite, baffling, unrighteous world the *fortiter in re* rule is doubtless essential, and, God helping, I would were it my duty be as hard as the hardest. None the less I prefer that the hand turned to iron should be some other hand than mine. After all, one cannot help being the son of one's father. You will not misinterpret me when I say that there are a freedom and a peace of mind which a man may well value above such dignities and duties as have lately been mine.

"I know what I am relinquishing. I will confess it was once my highest ambition to occupy the seat I am now voluntarily abandoning; but I never dreamed of plucking the Dead Sea fruit which has fallen to my share. I bow my head and shudder before the awful irony of Fate. Can the scoffers and sceptics be right? Is it true that men are but puppets in a game they can never understand? I hope not. I trust there runs a nobler purpose in the affairs of men than our dim eyes can discern: I trust that a benign Intelligence has ends in view which we cannot yet perceive however ardently we may guess. Meantime, I have had a sharp lesson, as Burke says, against being too much troubled about any of the objects of ordinary ambition. In a passionate passage Keats affirms there is no fiercer hell than failure in a great enterprise. For once I think a great poet is wrong. Success is sometimes a fiercer hell than any failure. I cannot tell how much I would give to-night to have failed in ever reaching the Bench.

"Forgive me, my dear Quinton, for troubling you with all this. For thus disburdening my heart I have no excuse whatever, except the privilege of your friendship. I will not attempt to tell how much I value that privilege, but I ask you to accept a simple expression of gratitude for a goodness which I find unspeakable. Towards me no man in England has been and done like you.

"As to the future my plans are the reverse of clear. If the British Constitution permit such things I may return for a little to the House of Commons. I may—but there, I must not strain the plea of friendship. Yet I could not attempt to go to sleep without telling you what has happened,

and thanking you, however feebly and ineffectually, for counsel and kindness which I shall ever gratefully remember.—Believe me, my dear Quinton, ever sincerely yours,

"E. KINLOCH."

On receipt of this letter Mr. Quinton made post haste for Harley Street full of protests and persuasions. He had seldom been moved to such a pitch; never so signally failed in hiding his emotion.

"What in the name of all the prudences is this?" he cried, breaking in impetuously on Kinloch. "It is utter folly, you know—utter absolute folly, the only folly of which I have ever known you guilty. You really must reconsider before this mistake is irreparable."

Kinloch rose to meet his friend with a weary smile. The storms and battles of the last month had left clear marks upon him. He was years older; there were tragic lines about the mouth; the eyes appeared to look painfully out of shadows; for the moment the natural energy of expression was wanting.

"It is like yourself to come," he said in a low voice.

"I came to insist on having this set right instantly," returned Mr. Quinton. "I will go to the Lord Chancellor at once, if you allow me, and see that matters are set right."

"You are very good, inexpressibly good," responded Kinloch. "But do not speak of seeing the Lord Chancellor. *Jacta est alea.* What's done is done irrevocably."

"You greatly disappoint me, Kinloch," said Mr. Quinton impatiently. "But I cannot believe you mean to cover your precipitancy with stubbornness. Think of what you are throwing away."

"The honours and emoluments of a judge," returned Kinloch, smiling faintly. "The chances of judicial fame, of being a terror to evildoers. Well! I have thought of all that, and found relief in being rid of my honours. It is no such folly, after all, to ease the mind, though the fortunate ones who have never had to pluck a burning coal from the breast may find that hard to believe. My one regret is that I disappoint you. The feeling bites like acid. But you will forgive me. I may seem wrong; but if one's private feelings count for anything, if place is not to be preferred before all else, then I am quite sure I am right."

"Tut, tut! You really must not go off into vagaries of

that sort. They do well enough on the stage or in novels. In actual life they are fatal. Would you at one stroke destroy all the fruits of your success? Come, give me authority to go to the Lord Chancellor before it is too late."

"My dear Quinton, impossible. It is too late already. Bear with me if I seem wilful and perverse. What's in the blood will come out. I always suspected myself of being something of a fatalist; and as to success, somehow or other it has turned to apples of Sodom. It may have come to me by mistake. Does destiny ever err in these things?"

"Never," replied Mr. Quinton emphatically. "Never."

"It hardly becomes me to say so," observed Kinloch, "but the Dispenser of good has been a little unkind. No, no, my success must have been undeserved. It amazed myself that at so many points I should have won against better men. The old doctrine that the gods humour those they intend to punish has its modern significance. It may be I am but reaping the fruits of temerity. My enemies, or if that be too strong a word, such as grudged me my pitiable good fortune may now rest in the satisfaction it was ill bestowed. Some one of them will more worthily fill the shoes I leave empty. I assure you the lucky man will excite no envy in me."

"The start has been trying," admitted Mr. Quinton. "But——"

"Pardon me," broke in Kinloch with sudden vehemence. "Trying is not the word. Say it was harrowing, horrible; say it crushed, lacerated, tore every nerve, left every sensibility uncovered. There are things in life worse than death, and I have drunk deep of one of them. Horrible! It gives me a sickening sensation to think of what I have had to do."

"It has been sore upon us all," said Mr. Quinton. "I have seen one of my best friends go where one would hardly send one's worst enemy; but it was not in our power to save him."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," responded Kinloch. "But we might have been spared the horror of sending him there: we might have spared ourselves, of course; but so it fell out, and so it was done; and the horror was none the less for what might have been."

There was a pause. Quinton felt himself drifting from his purpose, so he veered cautiously back, and presently said in a pleading tone,

"You will let me go to the Chancellor, Kinloch."

An expression of pain came into Kinloch's face.

"You have known me all these years, Quinton," he said, "and yet imagine I could totter and sway in a decision like this; that I could plunge across my Rubicon like a madman, and like a madman try to plunge back again."

"Not that," cried Mr. Quinton. "Not that. You must not put it like that. I was thinking of what you are sacrificing for a mere sentiment. We cannot save the world by flinging away great offices when our friends come to grief."

"Unhappily we cannot," returned Kinloch. "But we can at least make an attempt to save ourselves. You see I am selfish; I who had pinned my colours to the mast of duty have fallen back on the unheroic principle of self. You are disappointed; but, my dear Quinton, your disappointment is not the one-thousandth part of mine. Yet I would not make too much of it. What if I sit down among ruins, among broken hopes and discredited ideals? Better men have had to do that before to-day."

He stopped, playing nervously with his watch-chain; then all at once bent forward, a look of pathetic wistfulness in his face.

"Quinton," he said, gazing steadily in the other's eyes, "you are my friend; tell me, am I a failure?"

Quinton winked involuntarily. In the circumstances a man of the world could return but one answer to such a question.

"I will not conceal," he replied, "that to many people this will bear the appearance of failure."

"But you, Quinton, know and understand all: do you think me a failure?" He sat as if watching the answer forming on his friend's lips.

"I know very well," was the response, "that failure is as we take it—that it must always be comparative, and that what may seem a disaster is only a providence in disguise. Speaking in a professional sense I know that Sir Evan Kinloch could trample the possibilities of failure under foot."

"It is kind of you to say so," rejoined Kinloch. "But since he chooses to provoke the sneers, and worse still, the pity of the worldly, is he a failure?"

He spoke with feverish, disconcerting eagerness.

Quinton rose abruptly and looked out of the window. For a minute there was a silence in which the hearts of the two men might be heard beating. Then came again, and this

time with a tragic note of pleading, the words "Tell me, Quinton, am I a failure?"

Quinton wheeled with a face which all his professional art could not keep composed.

"No," he cried. "No! Forgive me for coming to you as I have come. I was grieved at the thought of your sacrifice. But I am sorry no longer. I have admired you for many things, but never half so much as for the courage that can rise to the height of a failure like this. You have never done anything half so characteristic. I ask no more to be allowed to see the Lord Chancellor."

Springing to his feet, Kinloch wrung his friend's hand.

"Thank you," he said fervently. "Thank you for that. If those who know me, if my friends appreciate my motives, the rest may talk."

"You can afford to despise them."

"I am not much in a mood to despise anything or anybody. But you have fortified me against the assaults of chatterers. Their talk will not trouble me. It is one thing to be foiled and beaten; it is quite another, I think, to take off the harness and lay down the sword and shield of your own free will. Another day they may be taken up again. The world has more battle-fields than one. For those who choose to gibe there may be surprises in store. Meantime I am comforted by the opinion I most value."

In expecting criticism, Kinloch was not disappointed. For a week and a day the resignation was the astonishment of the town. People asked meaningly what had come over the brilliant, steel-nerved Kinloch? And there were not wanting remarks about flashing meteors that dazzle and disappear. Quinton was adroitly questioned, but was as little to be pumped as the Sphinx. So conjecture ran its varied course.

While quidnuncs and tattlers were busy the subject of their talk was explaining things to a sister and an old dominie in the Highlands, both of whom took events much to heart. Mr. Proudfoot was eloquent on the dignities that had been resigned, and, thinking he meant to blame, Jessie rushed to the defence.

"And do you think I'm presuming to find fault?" cried the dominie. "What he does, he does. Bairns should never meddle in the affairs of men. I tell you there's not another man in England would do what he's done."

"The more honour to him," said Jessie.

"Amen," said the dominie.

Lauchie was the sole dissenter.

"God! I'd have hangit and herried them," he said with a determined shake of the head. "It's no every day ane gets a chance o' being upsides wi' the English fowk."

"Ay," retorted the dominie, "you're as grand as ever at the boasting." And Lauchie collapsed.

Some weeks later the London papers announced that Sir Evan Kinloch had gone abroad for an indefinite holiday.

CHAPTER XXIII

Six months later he was in Jerusalem. A distinguished visitor, he received embarrassing attentions from the Turkish Pasha who governs the City of David; but he was not there to be entertained, and preferred to be alone with his own reflections. Many times he passed to and fro through the seven gates, pondering their wondrous history. Long—long he meditated by the rubbish heaps of the Pool of Bethesda, the Holy Sepulchre, and under the minarets which show the wandering Christian where once the Temple of Solomon stood. He mused by the brook Kedron and went by moonlight and alone to Gethsemane, thrilling with thoughts of the cry of agony and the sweat of blood. With feelings not to be named he traversed the Via Dolorosa from the Hall of Judgment to Calvary. He had a vision of Jesus coming forth from the presence of Pilate in the midst of the jeering throng and the Roman spears, and pass along stumbling under the cross; and it came upon him with fresh and dizzying force how fearful a thing it is to judge.

"What," he could not help asking himself, "what will Pilate do in the great day?" And while the question rose there struck upon the awed imagination the thunders of the *Dies Iræ* which had turned him cold when he filled Pilate's office. Unhappy Pilate! A good man at heart, a man anxious to do his duty and keep his conscience clean; but it fell to him to administer the law, and for portion he got eternal

execration. And others had been compelled to do the deed of Pilate.

There were, however, sweeter, more tranquilising experiences. He visited Nazareth, where the boy Jesus went in and out and doubtless had playmates. Who were those playmates, and did they so much as guess their divine privileges? A whole day he spent in Bethany full of the sweet story which makes the mouldering village, lying forsaken under the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, for ever hallowed. Meditating among the ruins which the hunger-stricken children of Ishmael haunt, a passionate desire came upon him to write the Life of Christ. The full significance, the inner meaning of that life had never, he felt, been brought home to the hearts of men. Might it be his to accomplish that great thing? It seemed that there and then, looking up at Olivet of the triple peak and thinking of all it had witnessed, that the true purpose of his own life rose before him clear for the first time. Would it be his to depict the Son of Man in the world that crucified Him? Perhaps. Some day God might vouchsafe the essential inspiration. Meanwhile, the hope was a quickening glow.

Absorbed and exalted, he returned in the dusk of evening to Jerusalem, to learn from Mr. Quinton that Mrs. Dudley and Langham were dead, and that a general election was pending in England. He sat down in tragic revulsion of feeling to think of it all. Mrs. Dudley and Langham dead—and no word of Florence. Poor, poor Florence! "What had become of her?" he asked mentally, tears of bitterness and compassion leaping to his eyes.

He took up the letter again, turning listlessly to the political intelligence. "A big storm is brewing," wrote Mr. Quinton, "and I am authorised to say the party are particularly anxious to have you back. Come. It will be a rousing fight." The sudden contact with a world given over to a roaring seething vanity had almost the effect of sacrilege: so completely had he of late been living in the realm of imagination that it was as an electric shock to be put into touch with the hot and clamorous world of politics. Yet the fighter may not resist the bugle call even in the drowsy remoteness of Palestine. Hence the contemplative pilgrim packed up hastily, said farewell to the fat Pasha, regretting it was forbidden to tarry longer in Paradise, and made for home.

Within a month he was breathing the tumult of London, braced for the fray. The press, which discovers everything, noted that he was a frequent caller at Mr. Gasten's town residence, and, astutely putting two and two together, brought out the sum at considerably more than four. These visits, the world was told, were scarcely to be taken as mere tokens of private regard or friendship. Men do not hasten back from the Holy Land simply to gratify themselves with friendly calls. For a while the interviewers were baffled in their search for information and were therefore plenteous in theory. But at last an enterprising news-agency, circumventing official wariness, was able to announce definitely that Sir Evan Kinloch meant to return to politics. Speculation was instantly agog. Lawyers fastened on the Constitutional aspect of such a return from the Bench, and politicians hotly debated his prospective position in the party. Experts went to history and pronounced the case unique in interest.

In the midst of wild conjectures Kinloch paid a flying visit to Aberfourie, and while he was there the storm broke. It needed but that to set the fighting spirit aflame, and in twelve hours his address was out. He had meant to seek a constituency in England; but in their deeper wisdom the party managers arranged otherwise.

"Your native county is wavering," they said. "It needs a strong candidate. Take it for us."

He began with the memory of rejection at the hands of his own people sharp in his mind. But many things had come and gone since then. In particular the nameless Highland laddie had become famous, had proved himself intrepid, and, above all, had made a great sacrifice. That sacrifice and the motives which prompted it were not forgotten in the day of battle. Multitudes have courage for the fight; only a rare man here and there has the valour to sheathe sword and retire when his hand is on the spoil. Here was one. The other side fought bravely, but, as the dominie exultantly pointed out, Achilles was upon them in his might. Perhaps it was rather the fame of Achilles that was upon them. Be that as it may, Logieburn parish was with him to a man, and the wild enthusiasm there excited swept the county like a hill fire before the wind. Mr. Macnair, now in the vale of years and a lukewarm politician, stayed at home, admitting freely that Evan the son of David

was ordained of Heaven to greatness, while Dr. Douglas Macnair voted unorthodoxically and said nothing about it. His old schoolfellow had been irresistible from the beginning, and one way and another was an excellent friend to doctors. And when Sir Evan came in so far ahead that it was Eclipse first and the rest nowhere, and made a speech felicitously thanking his friends and eulogising his opponents, the Fair City saw scenes which are remembered to this day.

"A can never forget that nicht," they will tell you reminiscently, "when Sir Evan was first returned. Man, man! it's as good's a glass o' whuskey just to think o't."

The rejoicing was no whit less when a little later the Right Hon. Sir Evan Kinloch (now a baronet) took over the seals of office as her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Home Affairs. Kinnoul hill blazed in honour of the event, and some who had known the Home Secretary in his boyhood helped to set fire to the crest of Schiehallion. The world should know of their admiration. In the crowd that cheered the bonfires from the heights above Aberfourie Jessie and Mr. Proudfoot watched silently. But when the great red glare of Schiehallion was dying against the northern blackness, the dominie was heard to murmur, "My Evan, my brave Evan." It was too dark to perceive that his face was wet.

CHAPTER XXIV

So by hard and devious ways the front Treasury bench was reached. Of all who occupied that exalted and envied place none, not even the crowned leader himself, excited the interest alike of the House and the country to such a pitch as did the Home Secretary. A prime favourite and vital actor of old, he now returned with an added history which for the moment at least rendered him the most picturesque figure in an assembly rich in elements to stir and captivate the imagination. He still appeared so youthful; he had achieved so much; his experiences had been so varied, so romantic, and dramatic, the House told itself, the cockles of its big heart aglow. Moreover, whatever ordeals or crises he had passed

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generally as fatal. But those who obs
he had no longer the old delight in fence
itself. The budding warrior takes a secr
his blade, glad if a chance arise to prove
the veteran who has hewn his way thr
is usually content to forego the glory o
casual brawl he disdains to draw. Excep
the Home Secretary did not care to reme
science of war. It was thought the respo
and the custody of Cabinet secrets were n
These may have had their effect; but there
sons for the poignant human note he now
Here was a Minister of State who had g
world, and returned strong in the convictic
ment's sole duty is not to cling to office;
friend and advocate of the toiler, not witho
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passing them, might at any moment spri
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long standing in his case. Often it seemed to him that the multitudinous cry of misery beat upon the doors of the Home Office with frightful portents. What was the Home Office for, if not to look after the people, to take care if possible that the taskmaster did not lay on too heavily, and that those who ate their bread in the sweat of their brow had at least a fair meal? If a little ease, a little pleasure could be added, it would be so much the better for all. He knew, he had good reason to know, that nothing in this world is so dire as poverty (except superfluous riches); so he construed Government as a sort of paternal regulator. His idealism, in fact, was proof against the dry rot of routine.

In the discharge of his multifarious duties he had a disconcerting habit of going beyond merely official intelligence, and judging of men and things for himself. Thus, without warning he would ask for information on matters which, as tradition plainly showed, ought to be bound in red tape and laid for ever out of the way. Hence, permanent officials, living in continual dread of special statements, lamented that Government appointments had ceased to be sinecures.

"What are you to do?" asked a harassed secretary, "with one who works sixteen hours a day and doesn't turn a hair? who is eternally receiving deputations, investigating grievances, inquiring into this thing and that as if the Home Office were a kind of deputy Providence? If a Whitechapel costermonger called the Chief would receive him as if he were a prince, and we should all dance attendance on 'Arry. But then," with a happy little smile, "if there's anything in a fellow, you know he'll find it out; and by Jove! he'll remember it too."

The Home Secretary made a particular study of the prison and convict systems, and succeeded in establishing a commission of inquiry and reform. He was heard to say that while justice is justice it is no credit to a State to have overflowing jails. Petitions for the commutation of the death-sentence were his sorest trouble. How many nights he passed anxiously searching for something that would be a fair excuse for delivering a doomed wretch from the shuddering hand-shake of the hangman only those in intimate relations with him knew. But people understood it was a black case indeed when Sir Evan Kinloch declined to interfere.

He was perhaps a year in office when there came before him a detailed medical report on the condition of one of the largest of her Majesty's convict prisons. It was studied with an interest that was more than official. Upon one item he dwelt especially. The number of the convict to which it referred had been occurring frequently in the medical officer's reports. In consequence a specialist was dispatched with orders to make an exhaustive report on the case from the beginning, and his verdict was "dying by inches." This he reiterated in a personal interview with the Home Secretary.

"You are of opinion that incarceration is likely to have permanent ill effects on the convict's health?" the doctor was asked.

"More than that, Sir Evan, it will kill him; it is killing him now," was the reply.

"Thank you," said the Home Secretary. "Your report shall have my immediate consideration."

That afternoon Kinloch took the specialist's report home with him, spent two hours in deep deliberation with himself; then late in the evening went to Palace Gardans.

"Do me the favor to read that and take it as confidential," he said, laying the document before Mr. Quinton.

"Poor Dudley!" sighed Mr. Quinton when he had read it. "This is bad; bad indeed."

"It is good," contradicted Kinloch with shining eyes and a bounding heart. "I tell you it is very good, so good, Quinton, that I am going to liberate him."

"All things considered, it's a momentous decision," observed Quinton after a moment's thought.

"Momentous!" echoed Kinloch eagerly. "Yes, precisely so. This opportunity is worth all we have suffered. The prerogative of the Crown shall be exercised; and, Quinton, I thank God for the chance."

"The situation calls for courage," said Quinton, pulling vehemently at a cigar.

"It calls for simple humanity," corrected Kinloch, "humanity with perhaps a tincture of gratitude. But no matter what it calls for, my mind is made up. Only," he added after a pause, "I desire for various reasons which you will appreciate that the release should be kept quiet. Now one thing more: will you find Mrs. Langham and her little daughter—a Florence too, I understand? It will be an-

other service to us all. And when you succeed, keep your own counsel and mine."

"I will try," said Quinton; and the promise appeared to complete Kinloch's happiness.

Some six weeks after this interview a close carriage containing a lady and gentleman, the former in mourning and heavily veiled, drove up to one of the largest convict prisons in the south. The lady was Mrs. Langham, the gentleman Mr. Quinton. Instead of passing into the public yard, they were conducted by a private way to the rear. There Mr. Quinton got out and entered the building through a narrow door which opened noiselessly at his approach. Fifteen minutes passed; then the door opened again, and he reappeared, supporting a dazed and broken man who tottered and clung to him helplessly. At the sight Florence gave a sharp cry of pain; but the next instant she was stretching out her arms passionately to receive her father. When they were locked about him and she was sobbing and kissing at the same time, Mr. Quinton turned his back hard against the window, so that none should see.

In a few minutes he took his place beside them, and the carriage went off at a rapid pace. Florence held her father's hand, bending over it frequently to press it to her lips and bathe it with tears. Occasionally he made an effort to return her caresses; but mostly he looked from one to the other of his companions with questioning uncomprehending eyes. Once in looking out he caught sight of a policeman and gripped Florence like a vice, his face ashen with terror.

"They are after us!" he cried shrilly. "They are after us, and will catch me!"

"Dear, dear father, you are free," said Florence, trying to soothe and reassure him.

"You don't understand," he rejoined piteously. "They will catch me and I shall be punished. I saw what happened once when a man tried to escape."

"They are not after you, father," she sobbed, drawing him closer to her. "You are not escaping. You are with us; you are safe." And Mr. Quinton thrust his head out of the carriage window as if he had spied something of surpassing interest.

They were driven through echoing streets and along

green-bordered roads until they came to a small wayside station, embosomed in trees and merry with the songs of birds. There they took the train in which Mr. Quinton's forethought had secured a compartment for themselves. An hour's journey, by sleepy red-roofed towns and villages and through fragrant woods and fields, brought them within sight of the sea. A minute afterwards the steam whistle shrieked and they were at their destination, a lonely hamlet on the southern coast. Another close carriage took them quickly to an old-fashioned house outside the village, with a garden so Eden-like Adam might have kept it: flower-beds, fruit-trees, and perfect seclusion. At the grinding of wheels on the gravel, two servants, one elderly and the other young, ran out to welcome a mistress they had never seen, and if need to help her invalid father. In their presence Florence managed to repress a wonder that was hard to conceal; but inside it was no longer to be restrained.

"Where are we?" she asked Mr. Quinton, taking him a little aside. "Tell me what all this means."

"If you see your father made comfortable in his own room and come back to me in the dining room I will tell you," he answered. And when she returned overwhelming him with inquiries he said:

"One who is deeply interested in your welfare begs *you* will accept the gift of this house."

She caught him quickly by the arm.

"You, Mr. Quinton, you?" she cried. "You were always father's friend."

He shook his head.

"One who is his friend and yours much more than ever I was or could be," he replied.

She gazed at him for a moment, holding her breath; then feeling suddenly dizzy, clung involuntarily to his arm.

"Oh!" she panted, as if in the throes of a choking anguish "Not—but why should I think it? It cannot be, it cannot be!"

"I think," said Mr. Quinton very quietly, "I think you are right. It is Sir Evan Kinloch, and he has deputed me to beg your acceptance of this home."

She sank in a chair trembling and deathly white.

"O God! O God! what is this?" was her smothered cry. "What is this? My poor brain is giving way at last. I

am going mad; you are playing with me. It cannot be true."

She buried her face in her hands, and Mr. Quinton waited silently until the paroxysm was past.

"You are not going mad, my dear Mrs. Langham," he said softly when she could hear. "It is quite true in every particular. Not only has Sir Evan set your father free, but this house and all it contains is yours for the taking."

She rose as if to leave the room.

"Please do not tell him now," put in Mr. Quinton, thinking she meant to go to her father. "Do not tell him just yet. He cannot believe."

"I cannot believe," she answered, falling back with a hand to her head. "Oh, how my brain is whirling! Do not—please do not mock me. Kill me, that would be a kindness, but do not delude me as if I were a sick child."

"I would not do that," he replied in a queer voice. "Believe me, dear Mrs. Langham, I would not do that. Neither would he who has sent me. Let me repeat that this house and a certain income are settled on you if you will but accept them."

For a second she stared as if trying to look him through. Then the heart-peal came.

"O Evan, Evan! I have been saying hard things of you, I have been blaming you, saying you killed my husband and my mother and were killing me. I ought to have known better. I ought to have known better."

She hid her face again, shaking convulsively, and Mr. Quinton stole noiselessly from the room.

When he returned to town he was the bearer of a letter to Kinloch, which was as a cry from the depths.

"I have been blaming you," it said. "Forgive, forgive, and come to me. Come, I implore."

CHAPTER XXV

NEXT day little Florence, a brown-haired, chubby, audacious young lady of five, followed her mother from Palace Gardens, under a special escort. She was listening intently to the hissing of the big express engine when a strange gentleman, coming forward, saluted her with puzzling

... fingers, the little lady peered
eagerly at the contents, and then all at
herself, for thanks held out her pursed r
The kiss she gave and received was no p
moved away and she nodded blithely,
hand to her unknown friend. Then wi
who has business to get through she se
bags.

"Do you know that gentleman, dearie?"
ian, a staid Scotch nurse who had long
in the Quinton household.

Miss Langham could not answer becau
deep and fast in Turkish Delight, so she
her manner indicating that her ignoran
matter.

"Well," said the guardian, "feel yourse
not every little girl who is kissed by Sir E

She did not know how that might be,
intimate, but the Turkish Delight was ver

In the first flush of joy and excitement
the incidents of the journey were forgotte
was alone with her mother she sudde
something important.

"Oh, mama," she cried, "Sir Tinlock
and kissed me. Who is Sir Tinlock?"

"Who is Sir Tinlock?" she repeated, fin
did not answer.

"Mama's friend ..."

and went; in a dream he transacted business of State. Something dark, vague, indefinable, overshadowed all, somehow making the weightiest matters of no account. With a curious sense of unreality he set out. The roaring bustle of the huge metropolitan station from which he started was at times as the murmurous hum of another planet. Instinctively he picked his way in the din and jostle, giving no sign of absent-mindedness; but though his body was in the thick of the confusion his spirit was far away.

He hoped to slip unobserved to his place in the train; but first one hat and then another was raised as he passed. Before he could hide the whisper ran along the thronged platform that that was the Home Secretary, the man, as people said, who was one day to be Prime Minister, and he had to endure the ordeal of an ovation. As he turned in the carriage door, bowing and smiling bareheaded, several ladies remarked confidentially how "nice" he was. The more romantic detected a profound sadness in his face; and they marvelled among themselves why he did not marry and be happy. If put to the test, more than one fair sympathiser was ready to exemplify her pity on the spot.

No sooner was the crowd left behind than it was forgotten. That day the Home Secretary had no thought of popularity or policy or statecraft. Nor had he eye or ear for what took place about him. He did not hear the shriek and clangour of the rushing express. At stopping-places he hardly noticed the peering faces of those who, on a hint from the guard, tried to catch a glimpse of a Cabinet Minister. He saw no landscape; and so slight was his consciousness of progress or the flight of time, that when the guard, who had discovered the junction at which he meant to change, opened his carriage door, he asked in surprise, "Already?"

"The local train is on the other side, Sir Evan," said the man, touching his cap with one hand while the palm of the other had the sensation that guards like best. "Thank you, Sir Evan. I'll tell them to get you a seat."

"Please do not," replied Sir Evan. "I can easily get a seat for myself."

Nevertheless the guard did his duty by his mate.

"Bill," he said in the ear of him of the local, "see that gent a-crossin' to your train? Keep your eye on 'im. 'E's

the 'Ome Secretary and good for a thumpin' tip. I 'appen to know," grinning and nodding.

It appeared the Home Secretary could not escape the inconveniences of fame. All the same he managed to reach his destination unperceived by those he had come to see.

He was admitted by the elderly servant, who showed him into a drawing-room that gave a pleasant impression of brightness and comfort.

"What name, sir?" she asked, holding the door-handle. She had not seen him before: she did not know he was her master.

"Oh, you need not mention any name," he answered. "Just say that I—that some one has called."

The door closed and he sat down to wait, the resounding beat of his heart seeming to fill the room. A minute passed; two minutes, three; how long was the agony of suspense to last? At length his straining ear caught the sound of a foot on the stair, then the rustle of a woman's dress in the hall outside. He rose, his whole being athrill, the door opened, and Florence walked in. His heart stopped. For one breathless never-to-be-forgotten instant all feeling was suspended. The two looked at each other with fixed eyes; then without a word Florence advanced, holding out both her hands. He took them eagerly, bending over them as if they were his Queen's.

"You have come," she said simply. "It is good of you; good, good—part of your great goodness."

"It is good of you to allow me," was the response.

They meant to say so much to each other. Both had lain awake planning speeches for the supreme moment, and when it came this was all they could think of. For a full minute they stood dumb, holding each other's hands without being aware of it. Unconsciously Evan noted what a change had come over her. She was still, he felt, incomparably beautiful; but the beauty was not the beauty of other days. So an angel might look after great tribulation. The fresh delicately rounded face had become thin and long and very white, the eyes had ceased to dance and had grown pathetically large; and there were lines of suffering where once had been dimples. Even the luxuriant hair was losing its lustre. Yet she was surpassingly beautiful, with a higher beauty than had once enraptured him.

"You are pale," she said. "It has agitated you to come. We have brought great trouble upon all our friends."

"You must not say that," he protested. "I beg of you not to say that."

"I must say the truth," she returned. "Pardon me for letting you stand so long," she added. "Indeed, I forget myself. Will you take this seat?"

They sat facing each other, and gazing upon her he thought again how exceedingly beautiful she was. Old feelings, old memories came flooding and surging back. Why, why had Heaven denied him the one thing his heart craved most?

Florence sat motionless, her hands clasped in her lap. "We did not expect a meeting like this," she said, breaking the spell. "How am I to thank you, to tell you all I feel about what you have done and are doing for me and mine?"

"By never mentioning it," he answered in a low voice.

"I will not consent to that," she rejoined. "I must, I must say something, though I can never express a millionth part of what I feel. But I must speak, were it only to ease my conscience, for I have been very wicked."

"That is quite impossible," he said with conviction.

"No, no. You are wrong," she insisted, speaking very rapidly. "Not only is it possible, it is true. I have been saying and thinking hard things of you."

"But you will spare yourself and me the repetition of them," he pleaded. "You will put them from your mind as if they had never been thought or said."

"No, no. I cannot do that. Whatever else I may be I cannot be a hypocrite. I thought you were cherishing grudges; I thought you were dealing cruelly with us because we dealt cruelly with you. I know now you did what only your nobleness could do. I have learned everything. Do not blame Mr. Quinton for telling. A woman is not to be denied. I know all from first to last, about the defence, about everything. While I blamed, you were planning all this and much more. But I was driven distracted. You will forgive me—you will forgive me?"

Her voice had risen to an imploring cry. As she uttered the last words she sank on her knees, looking up at him with a face of piteous supplication. He stooped over her, hardly able to contain himself.

"Florence, Florence, you must not do that," he said huskily. "I can endure anything but that."

"Tell me you forgive me, then."

He took her hands and they closed on his with a wringing clasp.

"If you imagine there is anything to forgive, it is forgiven a thousand times over," he answered, raising her.

Tears flooded the dry hot eyes; she tried to speak, but had no words; so for thanks she pressed his hand vehemently to her lips. In the same instant a burst of childish laughter rang merrily through the house.

Little Florence was calling to some one, calling with breaks of noisy mirth as if enjoying some comical spectacle. She was heard skipping along the hall; the next minute she bounded in upon them, her hair flying rebelliously, her round face glowing like a damask rose. At sight of a stranger she paused, but recognising him ran forward holding up her mouth for a kiss.

"I have been having such fun," she explained with breathless eagerness. "Grandpa is back and I have covered him with flowers, and I am glad you came—he'll like to see you. They said grandpa wasn't coming back any more, like dear papa who has gone away to God for ever. But he has come," ended the little lass joyously. "He has come. Wait and I'll bring him."

"Not yet, darling, not yet," called the mother as quickly as she could find breath. But the child was beyond hearing. In another minute she was back, prattling excitedly as she led her grandfather by the hand, the remnants of flowers and grasses still clinging to him.

On entering the room he staggered, and would have fallen upon her but for the timely aid of the visitor. Was this shattered old man, grey and palsied, the once Napoleonic Dudley? He breathed stertorously as Evan and Florence placed him gently in a chair; but the old will power was not dead, and he rallied swiftly.

"I shall be myself in a moment," he told them in a thick whisper. "I shall be myself in a moment." And then, after a pause, and looking at Evan. "You will understand that this meeting tries me. I am not what I once was." And after yet another pause, "Well, sir, the whirligig of time brings strange changes—yes, undreamed-of changes. Who could have foreseen this? You will excuse a wrecked and

broken man if he is unable to speak becomingly. We have been blown about till we have lost our reckoning. My daughter has explained everything. It is beyond words. Take my poor thanks, Sir Evan, for rescuing and succouring a mangled fellow-creature flung helpless from among the grinding wheels."

"Had it been in my power to stay them, the wheels should never have ground," replied Evan, hardly able to articulate.

"I am sure of that now," said the other slowly. "Yes, I am sure of that now. I ought to have considered you more when we were together. I ought to have held on to you. But, sir, some of us are made blind, and have our sight restored too late. You might have pulled us all through. When the crisis came, if I had had one brain like yours to help me, I believe we could have weathered the tempest. As it was we went down—down headlong."

"You must not think of these things now," said Evan softly.

"To be sure it is idle vexing ourselves for nothing," admitted Mr. Dudley. "You were fulfilling your destiny, and I suppose we were fulfilling ours. These things are dark, and our destinies have been interwoven like warp and woof, only that you were strong and we were weak. When a certain thing happened I cried out against you, for I am only human, very frail and human, Sir Evan. I said, See what revenge is; and now—now this."

The voice, which had been surprisingly firm, broke, and tears poured down the deeply lined face.

"I cannot speak, Sir Evan, I cannot speak. Bear with me. My heart seems cracking. Your poor pensioner and debtor is beside himself with remorse and gratitude."

He rose trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"If you pardon me, I will leave my daughter to thank our benefactor. She may be able to express a little of what we feel. Out of the depths I pray God to bless you, Sir Evan. Come, my little Florence, let me lean on your shoulder, and we will go into the open air again. I feel stifled. There, my dear, there."

Florence, her childish merriment hushed in the awe of a profound mystery, wonderingly gave her help. She could not understand why her grandfather shook so much, or why her mother held a handkerchief so tightly to her eyes;

it is best I should," said Evan vaguely
see the ravages trouble has made."

"Poor papa!" said Florence, the tears
of her, "fate has blown hard upon him ar

"Keep courage and all will be well yet,'
drawing a little nearer her.

"I find it a hard thing to keep," she resp
him out of swimming eyes. "I once coul
best; but that was long ago. Yet I will h
ask me. Perhaps there is compensation to
are not somehow in some place redressed,
old pagans were right, and we are the sp
you used to tell me about. Sometimes
It used to be thought when they sported w
victims the sun was darkened. The sun is d
was among my flowers to-day," dropping h
ively, "and I wondered—poor foolish thi
seemed to be no bloom on them, until I re
will never bloom for me any more."

"They must," he replied in a tense voice;
are not to lose heart. You have still a futu

"It is unkind of you to mock me. Oh
mean that. You see how I forget myself.
that can bloom for me in perfection is the
goodness. That will bloom and be sweet til
Yes, and long after; long, long. I am too
debts, but I shall never cease to think of t

throw his arms about her and kiss away the glistening beads on her long eyelashes.

"You have been very, very successful," she added. "Only yourself would stoop like this."

It seemed a choking wave swept over him; his ears were drumming and singing.

"Do not say that," he replied hoarsely. "I am not successful. Long ago I set one thing before me; strove for it, prayed for it above all things in this world, and I was miserably foiled and beaten. I wanted you—you, Florence, and I lost you. I have been an abject failure."

She took a step forward, and laid a trembling hand on his arm.

"I cannot bear you to say that," she told him. "You have not failed because what we—what we once wished has not come to pass."

"Yes, yes, I have failed," he repeated. "I have failed where failure is misery—unless——" He paused, his eyes glowing as she had once seen them glow before. "Florence," he asked dizzily, "in spite of all—all that is past, will you let it be yet?"

For a moment she did not move; then she put her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"My noble Evan," she said. "I loved you long ago; I love you more than ever now. But certain things are for ever impossible."

"Not impossible," he cried brokenly. "Do not say impossible."

"Yes, impossible. There was a time and we missed it, and now it is too late. Put it from your mind. We have already cost you enough; let the sacrifices end. Take that," kissing him again. "But I am not fit to be Sir Evan Kinloch's wife."

"You are fit for the best in the land," he protested.

"Then I might be fit for you, for you are the best in the land, the very best. But whatever I once was I have now quite got over vanity. No. I could not stand beside you. You will go higher up yet, up to the very top; and I will sit in the shade and admire from afar, and in all the huzzaing crowds there will not be one whose 'God bless him,' will come so straight from the heart is mine. You know that?"

"I know," he answered. "But that is not enough. Florence, I want your love—I want you."

"[illegible] this is the end," he said like one
"Not the end," she corrected quickly,
his. "Not the end. As often as you h
come to me, that I may show my gratitu
in your own house. My prayers are your

CHAPTER XXVI

VERY soon after his interview with Mrs
Home Secretary wrote a brief note to his fi
ran thus:

"HOME OFFICE, WHITE

"MY DEAR QUINTON,—In going through
pective honours to be submitted to the Qu
sion of the forthcoming birthday I was de
find your name heading the list of baronets
first to congratulate you on this well-dese
I am particularly glad that it is proposed t
hereditary. You have a talented son to c
fortunes of the House of Quinton. May t
as great, as happy, and as long-continued
You will receive an official communication i
time let me know that it accords with your
cept the proposed token of the Royal favo
[illegible]

The Royal birthday came and went, bringing heart-throbs of elation or bitterness as expected honours were conferred or withheld. A little later the newspapers announced that the Home Secretary was taking a holiday among early scenes with his friend Sir Percy Quinton, Q.C., M.P. The argus-eyed diligently reported their comings and goings; but one event was missed. On an afternoon in the flush of summer a carriage travelled at a leisurely pace along the highway from Aberfourie to Pitweem. It had four occupants—Jessie, Mr. Proudfoot, now very white and gathered with age, Quinton, and Kinloch. Opposite the beech-tree field it stopped.

"You will rest, sir, while I walk down to the wood for auld lang syne," said Kinloch to the dominie. "Quinton, perhaps you will bear Mr. Proudfoot company. My sister can come or stay as she likes." And Jessie, divining her brother wished to be alone, elected to stay.

It was a day of such incomparable sunshine as Nature in her happiest mood vouchsafes in the Highlands. It seemed she was adorning herself in a thousand unsuspected elusive charms to surprise her lovers to ecstasy. As Kinloch went slowly towards the big beech-tree, the picture on which he paused to look once or twice to look was strangely, hauntingly familiar. It was as if he were treading the flowery ways of a long-remembered dream, now all at once revived with a magical vividness and reality. The scene glowed and smiled as it had so often glowed and smiled for him in the far past. The lush pastures were once again damasked in midsummer richness; upward the broomy thickets had the bewitching yellow glint that had refreshed imagination in the dusty city. He noted the green deepening into hazy purples, and these again fading into grey granite cliffs, which to-day looked soft in the warm light. The shining fields were dotted with labourers who hardly moved in the restful sunshine. So he had seen them basking and drowsing hundreds of times before. The thatched, crouching houses seemed asleep; bees hummed, burns glimmered and danced, massy white clouds made the horizon cool, and the breath of summer was as a gently moving censer, giving out sweet balms of wood and hill and meadow. In the beech-tree field itself cattle browsed ambrosially, while the herd, bare armed and bare legged, guddled trout in the Tullyven burn.

A watchful collie called the boy's attention to the intruder, and he looked up with a challenge which faded to astonishment at sight of the stranger's elegance. He was not used to intruders of this sort. Loyalty to duty (with a little incitement from curiosity) made him leave his guddling, and follow at a safe distance just to see what might take place. The unknown made straight for the big beech-tree. Reaching it, he examined the carved trunk minutely, peering closely as if he were shortsighted, tracing imaginary lines with his fingers, and, between whiles, looking intently up as if expecting to spy some truant among the branches, Turning suddenly, he perceived the herd, and beckoned.

The boy shuffled up, his head shyly on one side as if it were not his habit to encourage familiarity in strangers, even when they chanced to be fine gentlemen. His manner thawed as he was asked graciously about himself, his family, his dog, his cows, about guddling trout, poaching rabbits, and finally about the art of carving initials on beech-trees. His shrewdness, however, engendered a suspicion that somehow or other the gentleman knew more of the troubles and delights of a herd than was compatible with perfect innocence. A properly bred city person could never be so familiar with the hidden dangerous ways of the country.

Turning the conversation abruptly, the stranger advanced to the brow of the bank, and looked down through the leafy tangle.

"Thirty years ago," he said, "there was a fine clump of raspberries down there. Is it there yet?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, finding his companion's knowledge more and more uncanny.

"And if I looked after your cows, do you think you could go down and gather me some?" was the next question.

"Yes, sir," came with alacrity. "But you'll have to take care they don't get into Braeside's turnips. He would kick up a stoor." With that he dropped down the bank and disappeared among the hazels.

"So Braeside's turnips are still a trouble to Pitweem herds," reflected Kinloch with a little sigh.

When the boy returned with two big handfuls of luscious rasps, the gentleman thanked him in Gaelic. "What next?" thought the astonished herd, regarding the other with a mystified look. It was with a slight qualm he sat down on a root of the great beech to eat his share beside this inex-

plicable stranger. As he swallowed the berries whole, he kept eyeing this man of surprises, as if at any moment something unholy might happen. The gentleman seemed to be musing deeply, no doubt cogitating some fresh wonder.

"There was once a herd boy," he said presently, "who was so fond of fun and mischief, that he let his cows stray into his neighbour's corn and turnips, just as you might let yours into Braeside's—and his folly cost him very dear."

"Ay," said the boy quickly. "Did they lick him?"

"I'm afraid they did. Do they ever lick you?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are luckier than he was. Pray your luck may continue. What do you intend to be when you grow big?"

"Oh," returned the boy with a wide sweep of the hand, to indicate the range of his intentions. "I'll go away south, and be something. Wait, and I'll tell you," he went on, his eyes alight with interest. "There was once a herd here, just in this very place, and his name was Evan Kinloch, sir, and he went away to London and learned a lot of things, and made speeches that were put in the papers, I've heard, and now he lives in a fine grand house, and has a kerridge and horses. But he was awful clever, too."

The gentleman looked wistfully at the boy for a moment without speaking; then he asked—

"And would you like to do what Evan Kinloch has done?"

"Yes, sir, awful much," was the prompt response.

"And if you were to ask him, do you think he'd advise you to go away south, and get all that he has got?"

"I don't know, sir, but it's likely he would."

"I don't think he'd be so unkind," said the gentleman, in a tone of uncalled-for sadness. "No, I'm sure he wouldn't. I think he would advise you to stay among the hills and woods and green fields, and work with the plough and the scythe."

"Well! he didn't do that himself, sir," replied the boy, with an astute shake of the head.

"Ah! but he may be wiser now," remarked the gentleman in that plaintive tone for which the boy could discover no reason. "I feel sure he would tell you to remain in the Highlands and be happy. People sleep soundly hereabouts, you know; in the south they don't always sleep so well."

The rasps being now eaten, the gentleman wiped his fingers on a handkerchief, which, to the herd, was in itself

an irrefragable argument in favour of going south. As he reflcted on the grandeur of folks with money, he received a shock which made him imagine that at last the sky was veritably falling.

"Hold out your hand," said the gentleman suddenly.

The boy complied, unable to imagine what was coming; and there were counted one by one into his grimy palm five half-crowns, five whole shining half-crowns. He looked up in dumb amazement.

"That was once Evan Kinloch's wages for a whole year," said the gentleman in a low voice. "You have more, I am sure."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you see, you are in many ways better off than he was. Keep to the green fields and the running waters. When you go home tell them you saw one who happens to know Evan Kinloch very well, and that he advises you not to go south and make speeches and have a carriage and horses."

He rose hastily and took another long look into the oak wood stretching downward to the gleaming Tay. He could just hear the murmur of the river chafing in the rocky course he knew so well.

"I thank you for the pleasant chat and for the rasps," he said, turning. "We'll go now." And together they walked back. At the road they parted, the boy silent with wonder. Then the gentleman re-entered the carriage, and the party were driven away, going upward by Burnside and Duncairn. The boy, his five half-crowns still clutched in his hand, stood gazing after them. On the crest of the little hill beside the school the carriage was poised for a moment in high relief, its wheels flashing in the sun, so that his eyes were dazzled. But he fancied he saw his strange friend rising and looking back. Before he could make quite sure the carriage had disappeared, gone in that splendour of evening light.

THE END.













